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# chess

# MAGICAL MAGNUS!

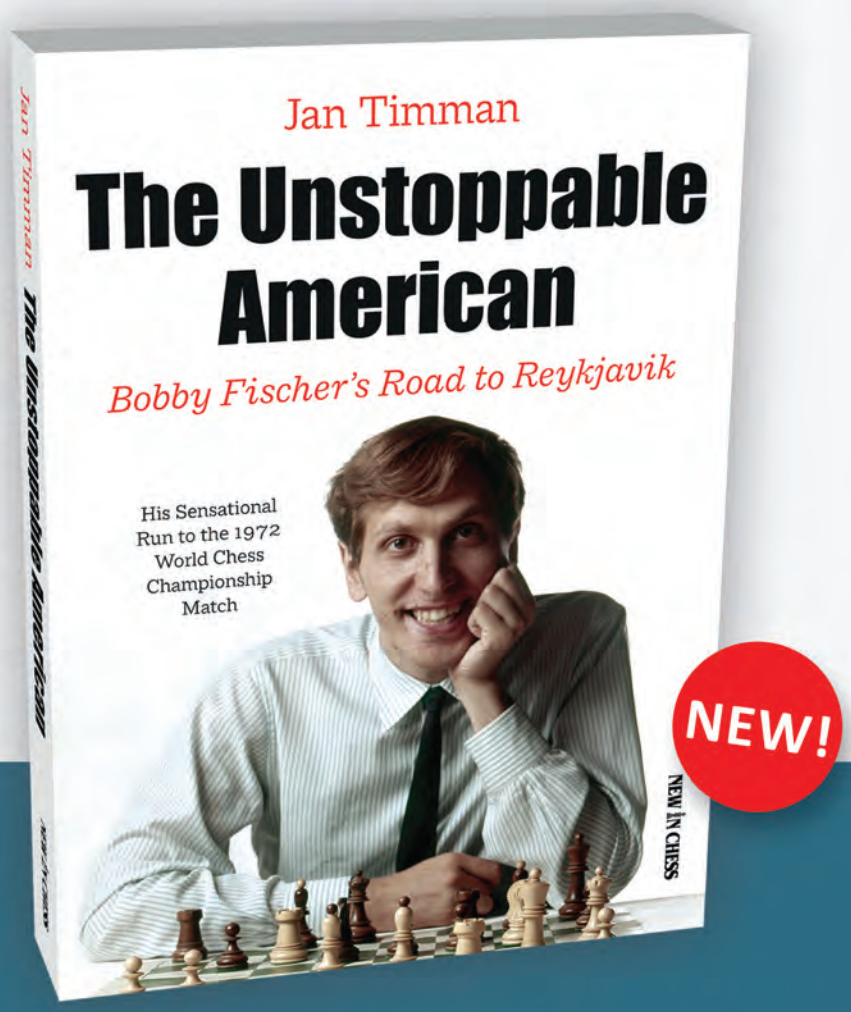
## The Champ roared back to form with back-to-back victories

ISSN 0964-6221

- Return to the Rock – John Saunders reports from the Women's Grand Prix at Gibraltar
- Room with a View - Steve Barrett had an unusual stay in a Beth Harmon themed room
- 'Tal on Acid' - Julian M Way introduces the attacking genius that was Albin Planinc

VISIT…

# Jan Timman has written another page-turner


Jan Timman
The Unstoppable American
Bobby Fischer's Road to Reykjavik
His Sensational Run to the 1972 World Chess Championship Match
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Jan Timman chronicles the full story of Bobby Fischer's dazzling run to the Match of the Century, and takes a fresh look at the games.

Fischer started out by sweeping the field at the 23-round 1970 Palma Interzonal Tournament to qualify for the next stage of the cycle. In the Candidates Matches he first trounced Soviet ace Mark Taimanov, in Vancouver. Then, a few months later in Denver, he was up against Bent Larsen. Fischer annihilated him, too. The surreal score in those two matches, twice 6-0, flabbergasted chess fans all over the world.

In the ensuing Candidates Final in Buenos Aires, Fischer also made short shrift of former World Champion Tigran Petrosian. Altogether, Fischer had scored an incredible 36 points from 43 games against many of the world's best players, including a streak of 19 consecutive wins. Bobby Fischer had become not just a national hero in the US, but a household name with pop-star status all over the world.

Another page-turner by Jan Timman, with annotations in his trademark lucid style, that happy mix of colourful background information and sharp, crystal-clear explanations.

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# Chess

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# Chess Editorial

**By Executive Editor, IM Malcolm Pein** **@TelegraphChess**

It was quite a tense time before we went to press, awaiting Boris Johnson's pronouncements on whether, or for how long, there would be a delay in the lifting of restrictions in the UK. Despite rules remaining in place in England until July 19th, I'm delighted to confirm that, yes, it's happening! ChessFest, an outdoor chess festival, will be staged by Chess in Schools and Communities over three days in London in what I hope will be one of the highest profile chess happenings ever in the UK.

Following schools events on Friday 16th July, we bring competitive chess back on Saturday 17th with a rapidplay outdoors in Manchester Square, a stone's throw from Chess & Bridge. It should be a strong tournament with GMs Mickey Adams and Gawain Jones already declared.

Space is strictly limited to ensure Covid safety, so by the time you get the magazine, we may be full. Do check chess-fest.com to see if there is availability, but please don't turn up on the day.

Please do come along, though, to the chess extravaganza at Trafalgar Square on Sunday July 18th, there will be events for all the family and for everyone from complete beginner to expert. The theme will be *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. Visitors will be able to learn the game, play chess, challenge a master or take part in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* themed activities in a Covid-secure outdoor space. You can find more information on the inside back cover of this magazine.

We will be playing inter-city matches online – there is a parallel ChessFest event happening in Liverpool. Also the two prodigies Shreyas Royal and Tani Adewumi, whose lives have both been transformed by chess, will be playing a match as well, all relayed on giant screens in the square.

You will be able to take on a top player either one to one or in a simul, and the emphasis will be on fun, so I'm not planning to run anything remotely like a formal tournament. The event is sponsored by an algorithmic trading company called XTX Markets which coincidentally has offices in the same building as DeepMind, the creators of *AlphaZero* and sponsors of the London Chess Classic.

See you there! Your support is vital – let's show London how popular chess is.

## Magnus is back, back-to-back

Crisis, what crisis? Magnus Carlsen was back to his old tricks and to use a much-maligned phrase, 'took back control' of the Meltwater Tour on Chess24 by winning an event at the fifth attempt. Carlsen won the New in Chess Classic, which was a fitting way to celebrate his company Play Magnus's purchase of the Dutch publishers. Don't worry everyone, we're still holding out – we haven't been assimilated into the Borg yet!

One of the highlights of online chess during lockdown – and I agree, sometimes there almost seems to be too much of it – are the battles between Magnus and Hikaru Nakamura. Most of the time, unless Magnus does badly in the preliminary sections, they meet in the final of the knockout phase and it's usually very close. In the New in Chess Classic final it wasn't really. Carlsen won the first set 3-1 and levelled the score in set two with a brilliant exchange sacrifice. This left Hikaru needing to win on demand with the black pieces and he never looked like managing it.

A few weeks later in the final of the FTX Crypto Cup, Carlsen had to face another opponent he sometimes finds difficult, Wesley So. So had defeated Carlsen in two previous Tour finals and taken the Chess 960 Championship from him on Carlsen's home patch. After an entertaining and sometimes blunderful struggle, Carlsen won in Armageddon and booked himself a place in the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour Finals in San Francisco this September, where the players will be across the board and not in their living rooms.

There was a whoop of delight and Carlsen described it as a "massive, massive relief" as he had blundered in the first blitz play-off game following an exchange of wins in the second set. So's win was particularly crushing.

Facing the abyss, Carlsen changed his shirt and managed to win on demand with Black – see our detailed coverage inside. The champ then had the momentum and won handily in the decider with White, making light of the time disadvantage. Carlsen picked up $60,000 plus a Bitcoin bonus of around $22,000. It was rather fun to see the value of the Bitcoin put up by the sponsor fluctuate in value during the event – usually downwards!

The Open Lopez's share price suffered after this debacle. The hanging knight on c6 proved Black's undoing.

*The BBC website has featured a few chess stories in recent weeks, including Shreyas Royal and Tani Adewumi, and how their chess skills have helped their families in in the UK and U.S..*

**H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen**
FTX Crypto Cup 2021
*Ruy Lopez*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 a6 4 ♗a4 ♘f6 5 0–0 ♘xe4 6 d4 b5 7 ♗b3 d5 8 dxe5 ♗e6 9 ♘bd2 ♘c5 10 c3 ♗e7**

10...d4 11 ♘g5 dxc3 12 ♘xe6 fxe6 13 bxc3 ♕d3 is one of the most famous games in the history of the world chess championship, Kasparov-Anand, 10th

matchgame, New York 1995, where 14 ♗c2!! improved over the 14 ♘f3 of Game 6.

**11 ♗c2 d4 12 ♘b3 dxc3**

12...d3 is also played, although 13 ♗b1!? has been causing problems for Black of late.

**13 ♘xc5 ♗xc5**

13...cxb2 14 ♗xb2 ♗xc5 15 ♗e4 wins the exchange. Remember this theme of the loose knight – it will recur.

**14 ♗e4! ♕d7 15 bxc3 ♖d8 16 ♕c2**

Attacking h7, and if 16...h6 there is the astonishing intermezzo 17 ♗e3!! ♗xe3 18 ♖ad1, forcing Black to return the bishop. After 18...♗d4 19 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 20 ♖xd4 ♕e7 21 ♗c6+ Black is in dire straits as 21...♗d7 allows 22 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 23 ♖d1.

**16...♘e7 17 ♗g5 h6 18 ♖fd1 ♕c8 19 ♗xe7 ♖xd1+ 20 ♖xd1 ♔xe7**

20...♗xe7 21 ♗c6+ ♔f8 22 a4 or 22 ♕e4 is no better.

**21 ♘d4**

Black needs two tempi to safeguard his king with ...♖d8 and ...♔f8, but he never gets them.

**21...♖e8**

21...♗xd4 22 cxd4 intends ♕c5+ and d4-d5.

**22 ♗f3!**

Threatening ♕h7.

**22...g6 23 ♕d2!**

Now after 23...g5 24 ♗b7 ♕xb7 25 ♘xe6 fxe6 26 ♕d7+ ♔f8 27 ♕h7!! is a stunner. Black loses in all lines: 27...♗e7 28 ♖d7 ♕c6 29 ♕xh6+ ♔g8 30 ♕g6+ ♔f8 31 ♖d3!, 27...♖e7 28 ♖d8+ or 27...♕c6 28 ♕xh6+ ♔f7 29 ♕f6+ ♔g8 30 ♕xg5+ ♔f8 31 ♕f6+ ♔g8 32 ♖d3.

**23...♗xd4 24 cxd4 ♗g4**

After 24...g5, 25 ♕b4+ or 25 d5 are too good.

**25 d5! ♗xf3 26 d6+! ♔d7**

*He's back. Magnus Carlsen might have been below form at Wijk and not quite at his very best in the first four Tour events, but he dominated the fifth then won the sixth for good measure.*

Or 26...♔f8 27 d7.

**27 gxf3 ♖e6**

Black is soon routed, but if 27...♖xe5 28 dxc7+.

**28 ♖c1 c5 29 ♕e3 c4 30 ♕a7+ ♔e8 31 ♖d1 ♕d7 32 ♕a8+ ♕d8 33 ♕xa6**

White hoovers the queenside. 33 d7+ ♔e7 34 ♕d5 ♔f8 35 ♕c5+ ♔g7 36 ♕c8 was another way.

**33...♔f8 34 ♕xb5 ♕g5+ 35 ♔f1 ♖xe5 36 ♕xe5 1-0**

As the magazine arrives with UK readers, the seventh leg of the Tour should be underway with a new sponsor. The Goldmoney Asian Rapid will put the players on their metal – sorry. This has a $100,000 prize pot and the sixteen players make up the most interesting field in the Tour so far, as they include Hou Yifan and Indian stars Arjun Erigaisi and Dommaraju Gukesh, who secured spots from an Indian qualifier and the Gelfand Challenge respectively.

With the GCT underway, I wasn't able to keep tabs on the qualifying events. The Gelfand Challenge featured young talents and several of the usual suspects led at some point, before finding the pressure too much to bear. In that sense it was a wise move of Gukesh to make a late run.

**D.Gukesh-A.Liang**
Gelfand Challenge 2021
*Accelerated Queen's Indian*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 b6 3 ♘c3 ♗b7 4 ♕c2 d5 5 cxd5 ♘xd5 6 e4**

6 ♘f3 is an interesting nuance as it rules out ...e7-e5.

**6...♘xc3 7 bxc3 e5**

The critical response. If Black plays with ...e6 and ...c5, he is a tempo down on the Petrosian variation of the Queen's Indian with 4 a3, only White hasn't bothered with a2-a3.

**8 ♘f3 exd4 9 ♗c4 d3 10 ♕b3**

Going for it. 10 ♗xd3 is objectively good, but utterly wimpish.

**10...♕e7**

The cold-blooded 10...♕f6! is playable for Black, and if 11 ♗g5 ♕g6 or even 11...d2+!? 12 ♔d1! ♕g6, if not then 13 h4 ♕xe4? 14 ♘xd2!.

**11 ♘g5 ♘d7 12 ♗xf7+ ♔d8 13 ♗e3**

13 0-0 must also be good, but now Black collapses in short order.

**13...h6?**

13...♘c5 14 ♗xc5 ♕xg5! is good for Black and instead even 14 ♘e6+ (14 ♕c4 ♘xe4 also isn't so clear) 14...♕xe6 15 ♗xe6

*A name you will surely hear more of in the future, Dommaraju Gukesh, the second youngest grandmaster in history, pictured here with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Fabian Picardo.*

♘xb3 16 axb3 ♗xe4 17 f3 ♗g6 is a mess, although White is better after 18 ♗d5! c6! 19 ♗xc6 ♖c8 20 ♗d5 ♖xc3 21 ♖xa7 ♗b4 22 ♔f2.

**14 ♗d5**

**14...♔c8?**

There are two perpetuals after 14...♘c5 15 ♗xc5 ♕xg5 16 ♗xb7 ♗xc5 17 ♗xa8? (after 17 ♕d5+ ♕xd5 18 exd5 ♖b8 19 ♗c6 White is better, but with ...b5-b4 Black can fight on even though d3 will fall) 17...♗xf2+ when 18 ♔xf2 ♕d2+ 19 ♔g3 ♕g5+ draws, while after 18 ♔d1 ♕xg2 it is White who must force a draw with 19 ♕d5+ ♔e7 20 ♕e5+ ♔d8 21 ♕d5+.

**15 ♘f7**

15 ♘e6 followed by 0-0 and ♖d1 is very good.

**15...♖h7 16 ♖d1 ♘f6?**

16...g5 hits the knight and after 17 ♗e6 ♖xf7 18 ♖xd3 ♗xe4 19 ♖xd7 ♕xd7 20 ♗xd7+ ♖xd7 21 0-0 ♔b7 Black can fight long and hard for a draw.

**17 ♗e6+ ♔b8**

**18 e5 ♗c8**

18...♘e4 19 ♖xd3 is too dire to contemplate.

**19 ♗xc8 ♔xc8 20 exf6 gxf6 21 ♕d5 ♖b8 22 ♕f5+ 1-0**

## Grand Surroundings for the Grand Tour

The 'terrestrial' chess tour got under way at Bucharest at the Sheraton Hotel, and as I write the second leg with Rapid and Blitz is underway in Paris. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave bounced back from the slight embarrassment of losing to his compatriot and wildcard entry Etienne Bacrot by demolishing Ian Nepomniachtchi:

**26 ♘d7!! 1-0**

It was great to see the GCT beginning with a high-class classical tournament. There was plenty of interesting and fighting chess. I'm ignoring the Radjabov furore and his propensity for making short draws online. He also drew all nine games at Bucharest, but in any sport, you get players of differing styles and differing attitudes, and I reject all the criticism of him. Most of it is made by people who haven't paid to watch and if they are really that bothered, they don't have to follow for free online.

In any event, as has been stated often, sooner or later if you don't perform, you won't get invited. Radjabov's Azeri compatriot Shak Mamedyarov certainly performed. A mid-tournament spurt of three

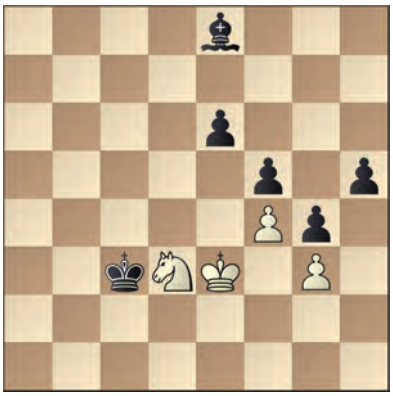
*The Paris Rapid and Blitz leg of the Grand Chess Tour took place at the striking setting of the Gobelins Manufactory, a historic tapestry factory and is now a partially-operational museum.*

*He's also back. Shakhriyar Mameydarov hasn't played in too many online events over the past year, but did well at the New in Chess Classic and then even more so at Bucharest.*

straight wins secured him tournament victory. His win over Fabiano Caruana with Black was in Shak's typical style and will be analysed next month.

Well played endgames became a rarity when classical chess was cancelled, like this beautiful finish from Levon Aronian against Bogdan Daniel Deac. The 19-year-old local hero was very close to defeating Anish Giri and ruthlessly put away MVL when the Frenchman played too optimistically.

**B.D.Deac-L.Aronian**
Superbet Classic, Bucharest 2021



Aronian is two pawns up, but Deac is hoping that his well-placed knight and blockade will ensure the draw. At this stage it rather looks like he will succeed: Black's king can continue its advance, but it won't get past d1. Aronian found a way to make progress by sacrificing his h-pawn to create a passed g-pawn.

**57...h4!?**

57...♔c2 was an obvious try and after 58 ♘c5 (58 ♘e5 ♔d1 59 ♔f2 ♔d2 60 ♘c4+ ♔d3 61 ♘e5+ ♔d4 forces White to move his king and 62 ♔g2 ♔e3 wins, but if 62 ♔e2 h4 63 gxh4 ♔e4 64 ♘d3 g3 and Black still wins) 58...♔d1 59 ♘xe6 ♔e1 Black wins as his king reaches g2 and wins the g3-pawn. However, White can do better with 59 ♔f2 ♗f7 60 ♘d3 ♔d2 61 ♘c5, which holds.

**58 gxh4 g3 59 ♘e5?**

59 ♘c1! g2 (or 59...♗h5 60 ♘e2+) 60 ♘e2+! (not 60 ♔f2? g1♕+! 61 ♔xg1 ♔d2 62 ♘b3+ ♔e3) 60...♔c4 61 ♘g1 holds.

**59...♗h5 60 ♘d7**

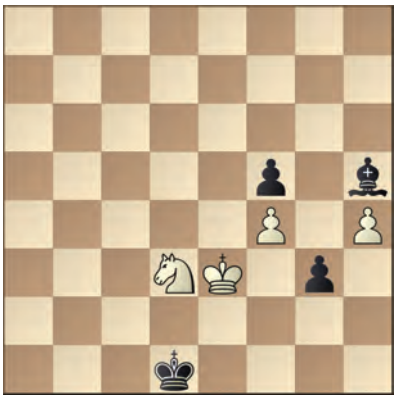
White intends ♘f6 followed by an advance of the h-pawn.

**60...e5!! 61 ♘xe5**

Or if 61 fxe5 f4+ 62 ♔xf4 g2.

**61...♔c2 62 ♘d3 ♔d1 0-1**

It's zugzwang, If 63 ♔d4 g2 or if the knight moves then 63...♔e1.



*We are used to seeing a smart Daniel King behind the microphone, but I was delighted to see our star columnist's delight at both attending a football match in person and catching his beloved Brentford promoted to the Premier League after the Championship play-off at Wembley. Was he just a little excited? With my Liverpool boys away at the Bees on September 25th, I may have to see if I can wangle a ticket from Danny or his wife Mairéad!*

# Return to the Rock

**Zhansaya Abdumalik dominated the final leg of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix, as international chess returned to Gibraltar. John Saunders was fortunate to be there**

I have reported on international, over-the-board, classical chess tournaments many times before in these pages, but I can truly say that never before has it given me as much pleasure. And that's simply for the fact that it was exactly that: an international, over-the-board, classical chess tournament, played under pre-pandemic conditions, without face masks or protective screens, etc.

The past eighteen months have been a trial to us all, much of it spent cooped up in our homes, with only those of us lucky enough to have close relatives able to enjoy physical human company. I think I can speak for all those who were present for the FIDE Women's Grand Prix at the Caleta Hotel in Gibraltar from May 22nd to June 2nd, as players, organisers, officials and press, when I tell you how lucky and privileged we all felt to be present at a proper chess tournament in all its pre-pandemic glory.

Not that the pandemic didn't intrude in a variety of ways, of course. "The major achievement of this tournament," said local tournament organiser Stuart Conquest before the event, "will be if everybody manages to get here." Even those of us travelling from the UK on a routine flight from London's Heathrow to the Rock found ourselves in a bewildering new world of red tape relating to international travel. Voluminous forms had to be filled in, Covid tests booked in advance, certificates shown to officials at airports, etc.

One imagined oneself in an old 1950s war film, like a British agent with forged documents tensing up as a Gestapo officer peered suspiciously at one asking "papers, please". Even intrepid international traveller Nigel Short, engaged as first-week commentator, felt the pressure: "Unfortunately, despite years of experience, I have become stressed about the process of travelling itself. Do I have the right tests? Have I filled in the forms correctly? So many new worries," he tweeted a day before the tournament started.

Travellers from the UK were the lucky ones. Most of the players came from much further afield. Stuart Conquest, trying to coordinate the arrivals of tournament attendees, asked technical arbiter Matthew Carr and me to look out for two players (and one of the players' mother) on the same flight as us and help them to negotiate all the necessary bureaucratic hurdles.

The three were Dinara Sadukassova and her mother Oral, who had already endured a nightmare journey from Almaty in Kazakhstan, and Kateryna Lagno, who was travelling from Moscow. Matthew and I duly met these three ladies at Gibraltar Airport and offered our assistance. It was my doleful responsibility to break the news to them that their problems were not quite over since, before making our way to the venue, they would need to fill in a local passenger locator form and book a Covid test.

*The FIDE Women's Grand Prix was on a much smaller scale than the popular, annual Gibraltar International Chess Festival, but also took place at the same venue, the Caleta Hotel.*

It would be fair to say that this message was not received with universal joy – which is entirely understandable – though the fact that I am writing this article tells you that the messenger was not killed. In fact, I was mightily impressed with the way Dinara tackled the bureaucracy via her mobile phone on behalf of herself and her mother, while Kateryna commandeered my phone and did much the same for herself. But it took around an hour and a half to complete the process before we could all adjourn to the familiar, chess-friendly haven of the Caleta Hotel.

Happily, play began on time on May 22nd with all participants present, though it was a close-run thing: Russian GM Valentina Gunina arrived after another very trying journey only a matter of hours before the start time. Dana Reizniece-Ozola, Managing Director of FIDE, and herself holder of the woman grandmaster title, made the ceremonial first move for Gunay Mammadzada (Azerbaijan) against former women's world champion Antoaneta Stefanova of Bulgaria. The set-up was perfect, with the FIDE officials meshing perfectly with the local organisers and arbiters to form as perfect and harmonious an organisational team as I can ever recall.

There was one quick draw in the first round, predictably between the Muzychuk sisters, but the percentage of fighting chess was commendably high, and certainly way higher than we see in most super-GM events. With 38 decisive games out of 66, with 24 won by White and 14 won by Black, online spectators couldn't complain. One player was responsible for ten of these decisive results, with her only draw running to a staggering 135 moves in the final round, thus seriously delaying the prize-giving and celebratory post-tournament dinner. This was Valentina Gunina, last to arrive in Gibraltar and last to finish play, along with her opponent Nana Dzagnidze, in the final round.

It's tempting to give Valentina the nickname of 'Gung-Ho' Gunina as she played every game to the death, and on occasion it was her own death as she overplayed dead drawn positions and even contrived to lose one such example. It's worth recording the numbers of moves in her 11 games in round order: 46, 52, 45, 63, 79, 66, 96, 54, 133, 61, 135. That's an average game length of 75 moves.

By contrast, the two players with the most

draws were Kateryna Lagno and Anna Muzychuk, with seven draws apiece, but they too played fighting chess. It's worth explaining that this pair had eyes on a prize other than simply first place in the tournament. This was the fourth and final leg in a series of four tournaments in the Women's Grand Prix in which players were competing for an overall points tally which might qualify them for the Women's Candidates tournament. I'm not proposing to explain this in any detail as it is complicated, and it was also not easy to foresee likely qualifiers even as the tournament unfolded.

So, to some action: there is no mercy shown in chess and you can imagine Alina Kashlinskaya was keen to exploit the advantage bestowed upon her by her fellow countrywoman Valentina Gunina's desperately late arrival at the tournament, not to mention the advantage of the white pieces. As the game unfolded, the result looked all too predictable.

Soon the commentators Nigel Short and Fiona Steil-Antoni were telling spectators what a hopeless mess Gunina was in and despairing of her chances. But then chance took a hand: Kashlinskaya overlooked a clever intermezzo move. It didn't turn the position through 180 degrees by any means, but it transformed what started as a desperate exchange sacrifice into a rather more potent one. The psychological damage was done, Kashlinskaya's confidence was deflated, and she went on to lose. At the post-game interview Gunina gave me a rueful smile in the studio, and an honest assessment, telling me she felt "tired and lucky".

**A.Kashlinskaya-V.Gunina**
Round 1
*Slav Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 c6 3 ♘f3 ♘f6 4 ♘c3 dxc4 5 a4 ♗f5 6 e3 e6 7 ♗xc4 ♗b4 8 0-0 0-0 9 ♕e2 ♗g6 10 ♘e5 ♘bd7 11 ♘xg6 hxg6 12 ♖d1 ♕c7 13 e4**

Going for a big centre. 13 ♗d2 was Wesley So's choice against Fabiano Caruana in a Lichess game in 2020, which Black won.

**13...e5 14 d5 ♖ad8**

14...♘b6 15 ♗b3 a5 16 ♗g5 ♘fd7 was Gunina's continuation against Chernobay in an online event a few weeks previously, which she went on to win.

**15 dxc6 bxc6 16 ♕c2 ♕a5?**

Gunina's brain is still on the plane. This costs her time.

**17 ♘a2! ♗e7 18 b4! ♕c7**

18...♗xb4 loses the exchange for a pawn after 19 ♘xb4 ♕xb4 20 ♗a3, skewering the rook.

**19 a5 c5 20 ♗g5**

White has no need to attend to the pawn on b4 since a crude tactic (♗xf7+ and ♕xc7) would follow 20...cxb4.

**20...♘b8 21 b5 ♖d4**

I'm not entirely sure why Black doesn't take the pawn on a5, either immediately or after exchanging rooks, but White would have reasonable positional compensation.

**22 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 23 ♘c1 ♖fd8 24 ♘b3 ♘d7!?**

Black, worse positionally, decides to throw down a challenge to White. There is no good reason not to take the material.

**25 ♘xd4 exd4 26 ♖a3 ♘e5 27 f4?**

This proved to be a turning point, though more of a psychological one. White didn't really need to do anything special here, just maintain a grip on the position with a move such as 27 ♕b3.

**27...d3!**

This little dig in the ribs helps to open up rank and diagonal for action by rook and bishop. Gunina thrives on active play along open lines and it was a mistake to give her what she wanted.

**28 ♕a2 ♘xc4 29 ♕xc4 ♖d4 30 ♕c1 ♕d7 31 b6 c4 32 a6?**

There are still good moves to be found here, such as 32 ♕b1!, when White might still be close to winning, but they are now harder to find and the smooth playing surface of a few moves ago has been churned up into a treacherous swamp on which the positionally inclined Kashlinskaya is less sure of her ground.

**32...♖xe4 33 b7 ♕e8**

Engines call this an equal position, but I call it a nightmare for White. What to do about those menacing passed pawns? Or a bishop invasion via d4?

**34 h3?**

Pretty much the only viable move here is 34 ♕b1! which at least comes with a threat, namely promoting the b-pawn, though this is easily parried via 34...♗d4+ and 35...♗b6.. Perhaps the reason why ♕b1 is so hard to find is that the queen only just came from b1 two moves before.

**34...♗d4+ 35 ♔h1 ♗e3 36 ♕c3 ♗xf4**

Another aspect of White's nightmare is that her opponent's moves are all simple and obvious, but hers are hard to find.

**37 ♖a5**

Good moves are getting harder and harder to find. Engines suggest the improbable

*Note the caffeine supplies Valentina Gunina has ready in advance next to the board. Her shortest encounter was 45 moves, her longest some 135, as she averaged a whopping 75 moves a game.*

37 ♖aa1 ♗e5 38 ♕a5, giving back the exchange, but it still looks dodgy for White.
**37...♕c6 38 ♖e1 ♗c7 39 ♖e5!?**

**39...♖xe5!**

White's last desperate throw was very clever, hoping for 39...♗xe5? 40 ♕xe5 ♖xe5 41 b8♕+ ♔h7 42 ♕xe5 which saves a half point, but Gunina now has the bit between her teeth.
**40 ♖xe5 ♕d6!**

One of those delicious moves that solves all your problems at a stroke – covers promotion tricks, threatens a promotion trick at the other end of the border, attacks the rook, effectively skewers it to the mating square on h2... and reaches the time control.
**41 b8♕+ ♗xb8 42 ♖e8+ ♔h7 43 ♖xb8 ♕xb8 44 ♕xc4 ♕d8 45 ♕c1 d2 46 ♕d1 ♕d4 0-1**

*Another tournament Alina Kashlinskaya would have defeated Valentina Gunina in round 1, not allowed such a turnaround.*

Meanwhile Zhansaya Abdumalik had dispatched her Kazakh colleague Dinara Sadukassova in a smooth positional game. While poor Alina Kashlinskaya was enduring the above nightmare against Gunina – and she was to suffer two further horrible reversals of fortune in rounds two and five – Abdumalik's serene progress through the tournament had begun. As an IM with two GM norms to her name, but still 27 rating points shy of the necessary 2500 rating threshold, the odds against her clinching the title in Gibraltar as the seventh highest-rated player in a formidable field seemed remote as the tournament began.

*Nigel Short is normally on his travels pretty much every month, but not of late. He was relieved to make it to the Rock, where he provided popular commentary alongside Fiona Steil-Antoni.*

The fact that Abdumalik eventually managed to do so with two rounds to spare, when Valentina Gunina overplayed and overreached in an unforgettable 133-move game, I still cannot quite believe. She had a couple of other strokes of luck along the way, particularly when escaping defeat against her friend and rival IM Gunay Mammadzada of Azerbaijan in round three, and also against Nana Dzagnidze in round seven, but her confidence, energy and preparedness saw her through to an overwhelming success and she was a worthy and popular winner.

Abdumalik's win against Nana Dzagnidze started with a London System, which has a reputation for being quiet, but this one was more of a slow burner which suddenly caught fire, though Abdumalik was soon able to dowse the flames as Dzagnidze lost her way. There was more than a hint of rustiness in White's play here, probably as a result of a long absence from OTB classical play, and this was arguably a feature of some other games too.

**N.Dzagnidze-Z.Abdumalik**
Round 7
*London System*

**1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♗f4 c5 4 e3 ♘c6 5 ♘bd2 cxd4 6 exd4 ♗f5 7 c3 e6 8 ♕b3 ♕c8 9 ♗e2 ♗e7 10 0-0 0-0 11 ♖ac1 h6 12 c4 dxc4 13 ♘xc4 ♕d7 14 ♖fd1 ♖fc8 15 ♘fe5 ♕d8**

Offering a pawn. White accepts and there is no reason not to.
**16 ♕xb7 ♘xd4?**

Whoa! That caused the commentators' eyebrows to raise. Instead, 16...♗e4!? offers a degree of compensation.
**17 ♔f1?!**

17 ♗f1! asks rather more questions of Black's decision to capture on d4 since there is no easy way to relieve the pin along the d-file.
**17...♗e4 18 ♕a6 ♗c5 19 ♗e3 ♘d5**

The L-shaped wedge of minor pieces in the centre of the board makes for an unusual pattern. It also promises tactical complexity.
**20 ♗h5 ♘xe3+ 21 ♘xe3**

21 fxe3? ♕f6+ 22 ♔g1 ♕g5 is a bad idea.
**21...♕g5 22 ♗xf7+ ♔h7 23 ♖xd4?**

23 ♘3g4! looks like an awkward way to shield the threat against g2, but it gets the vote from *Stockfish*. White would still be a bit better after that.
**23...♕xe5 24 ♖xe4?**

White has lost the thread. 24 ♖cc4 is another odd-looking engine choice, but might offer hope here.
**24...♕xe4 25 ♗xe6 ♖f8 26 ♖xc5 ♕xe3 27 ♖c2 ♖ae8 28 ♖e2 ♖xe6 0-1**

Next up is a rare example of a game which only became truly interesting when it reached move 100.

**V.Gunina-Z.Abdumalik**
Round 9

For the past 40 or 50 moves, the position had been much the same as you see here, with the only difference being that the white king has only recently wandered away from the h-file in the hope of doing something on the queenside. Quite what that was is a mystery to me, as it was to commentators Veselin Topalov and Fiona Steil-Antoni and other tournament officials whose thoughts were probably more focused on what time the hotel restaurant stopped serving. White had been endeavouring to conjure up something out of nothing in the hope of, say, giving mate on h8, so now we could only presume that the migration of the king to the queenside might reveal a new plan.

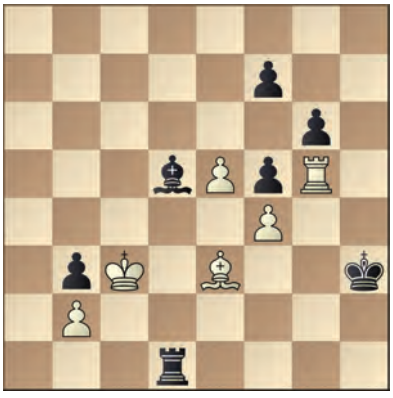
**101 ♗c5 ♔h6 102 ♔d2 ♔h7 103 ♔c3 ♔h6 104 ♔b4**

OK, we get it, the ♗c5 move was designed to create an underpass for the king to reach the b-file. But suddenly commentator Veselin Topalov sprang to life – had White succeeded in turning a dead draw into a dead loss?

**104...h4!**

Topalov hadn't been using an engine, but those with benefit of silicon had actually been jumping up and down since move 101, when 101...g5! might have set off a successful black uprising a few moves earlier. But, credit to Abdumalik: the hours spent shuffling her king back and forth might easily have put her into a catatonic stupor, but she too was alive to this improbable opportunity to break out of jail and perhaps seal her grandmaster title.

**105 gxh4 ♔h5 106 ♖a1 ♔xh4 107 ♖g1 ♔h3 108 ♖g5 ♖d8 109 ♔c3 ♖d1 110 ♗e3 ♗d5**



*Zhansaya Abdumalik rode her luck a little at times, but was also a most impressive winner of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix as she completed the requirements for the GM title on the Rock.*

The watching crowd took a deep breath – has Abdumalik slipped up?

**111 ♗f2**

But what about 111 ♖g1, forcing off the rooks and taking it into an opposite-coloured bishop endgame? Had they both missed this? Well, maybe not: Abdumalik, after 111...♖xg1 112 ♗xg1 g5, told us later that she still fancied her chances of winning. Engines may disagree, but Abdumalik's judgement of her practical chances still makes a lot of sense.

**111...♔h2 112 ♗a7 ♔h3 113 ♗e3 ♗e6 114 ♗f2 ♖c1+ 115 ♔d3 ♗c4+ 116 ♔d4 ♖c2 117 ♗e1 ♗e6 118 ♗c3 ♖e2 119 ♔d3 ♖e4 120 ♗d2 ♗c4+ 121 ♔c3 ♔h2 122 ♔b4 ♗d5+ 123 ♔c3 ♖c4+ 124 ♔d3 ♖c2 125 ♗c3 ♖f2 126 ♔d4 ♗b7**

Another sharp intake of breath by the engine-watchers online and in the studio. Has Zhansaya blown it? I personally was beginning to wonder whether, as post-game interviewer, I could reasonably expect either one of these players to come and share their thoughts after such a mind-numbing, energy-sapping game. But I preferred my problem to theirs. This was heart-stopping stuff, as exciting as a tennis battle between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka.

**127 e6**

Yes! Valentina finds the right shot. Deuce!

**127...fxe6 128 ♖xg6**

No! Valentina's netted the pawn! Advantage Zhansaya. 128 ♔e5! was the right way to proceed though there would still be tennis, oops, I mean chess, to play after that.

**128...♖xf4+ 129 ♔e3 ♖f3+**

Match point...

**130 ♔e2**

130 ♔d2 keeps the game going, but Valentina's left the court wide open with a smash on the cards...

**130...♖xc3!**

"Ooh, I say, what a dream volley!"

*Victor Zhansaya Abdumalik looks a little overwhelmed, as does Mariya Muzychuk to her left, but otherwise it was all smiles from the field as the FIDE Women's Grand Prix drew to a close at Gibraltar, with Valentina Gunina's famous smile visible third from the right.*

Zhansaya's on the brink...

**131 bxc3 b2 132 ♔f2**

Careful, now – could be match point in the other direction...

**132...♔h3 133 ♖h6+ ♔g4 0-1**

Valentina can stop the pawn promoting with 134 ♖g6+ ♔f4 135 ♖g1, but then 135...♗e4 wins the rook, after which the mopping up process is easy. A minute or two later, I was called upon to do my best Sue Barker impression and interview the winner. It was also a privilege to be the first person to address her by her new title: "Grandmaster Zhansaya Abdumalik! How does it feel...", etc, etc.

Later I chatted with the commentators and they were almost as dazed and exhausted as the players, after the strain of thinking up new things to say during the last two hours or so of that epic battle. Fiona Steil-Antoni said something about it being pretty much the most exciting, remarkable or amazing game she had ever witnessed. I was so tired I didn't really take in exactly what she said, but I would have to say the same myself.

These two players were the stars of the tournament, Zhansaya Abdumalik for her remarkable coolness, ingenuity and energy, and Valentina Gunina, though she didn't win a prize and finished with a minus score, for her indomitable fighting spirit and the sheer entertainment value of her games.

The following day Abdumalik wrapped up first place with a round to spare and in the final round Kateryna Lagno managed to stay just ahead of Nana Dzagnidze and Mariya Muzychuk in the race for the final place in the Women's Candidates' tournament. Kateryna's a seasoned professional player, and played with great *sang froid*, losing only one game to the up and coming Gunay Mammadzada, with whom she shared third place. Mariya Muzychuk's consolation was a creditable second place, 1½ points behind the player who finished first and thus deserves to take the final curtain call in what was an exciting, superbly organised and hugely enjoyable chess drama – Zhansaya Abdumalik of Kazakhstan.

**FIDE Women's Grand Prix – Gibraltar – 22nd May to 2nd June, 2021 (Category10, average rating = 2497)**

| | Player | Country | Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Pts | TPR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Zhansaya Abdumalik | KAZ | 2472 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 8½ | *2699* |
| 2 | Mariya Muzychuk | UKR | 2544 | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 | *2583* |
| 3 | Gunay Mammadzada | AZE | 2443 | ½ | 0 | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 6½ | *2556* |
| 4 | Kateryna Lagno | RUS | 2546 | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 6½ | *2546* |
| 5 | Elisabeth Paehtz | GER | 2456 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 6 | *2525* |
| 6 | Nana Dzagnidze | GEO | 2524 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 6 | *2519* |
| 7 | Anna Muzychuk | UKR | 2535 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | 0 | ½ | 1 | 0 | ½ | 5½ | *2482* |
| 8 | Alina Kashlinskaya | RUS | 2494 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | * | 1 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 5 | *2450* |
| 9 | Antoaneta Stefanova | BUL | 2470 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | * | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4½ | *2423* |
| 10 | Valentina Gunina | RUS | 2421 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 0 | * | 1 | 1 | 4½ | *2428* |
| 11 | Dinara Saduakassova | KAZ | 2500 | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 0 | * | 1 | 4 | *2383* |
| 12 | Irina Bulmaga | ROU | 2440 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | * | 2 | *2229* |

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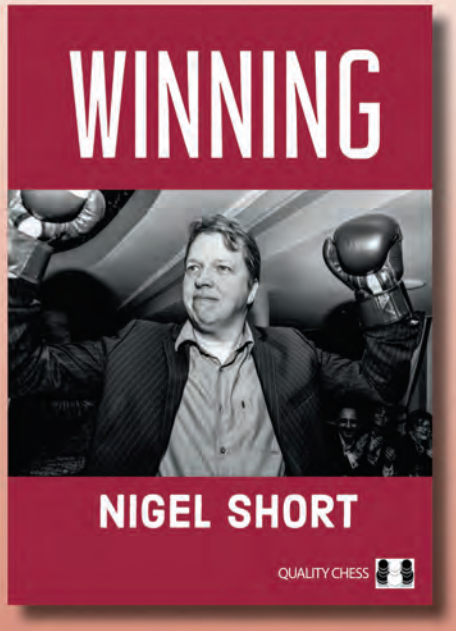


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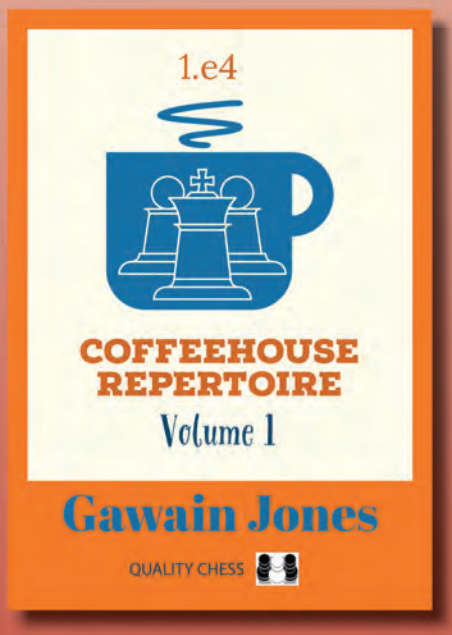


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# A Short-Term Solution?

**Ravi Haria reports from Elstree where the ECF hosted a European Hybrid Qualifier**

For obvious reasons, the last year has witnessed a huge increase in online chess – something which I generally dislike, as I often find it difficult to 'get in the mood' for online games, playing on the same screen which two minutes earlier was being used for a Zoom lecture. Therefore, having been granted the opportunity to play in the European Hybrid World Cup Qualifier, I was curious to see the extent of the difference from regular online chess.

The event, like most regular tournaments, took place in a hotel. Each federation was required to gather and play their games in the same room, essentially to prevent cheating. While the other English players (Andrew Horton, Ameet Ghasi, Marcus Harvey, and Simon Williams) all stayed at the hotel, I was extremely fortunate in that the designated venue was only a 30-minute walk from my parents' house – my place of residence for the week.

Covid regulations were not too strict – we had to test negative on a lateral flow test every two days, and we were able to remove our masks whilst playing. The format of the event was clear: we had to win three matches to qualify for the World Cup. Each match comprised of two classical games against the same player, and if tied, two more games with a rapid time control, finally followed by an Armageddon game if necessary.

Immediately, it was apparent that I would certainly find it easier to maintain focus than if I was just playing in my house. Every player had the option of playing with a chess set next to their laptop, something which we all utilised, first inputting the move on our laptops, and then completing the identical move on our boards. The ability to play alongside other chess players gave the situation a bit more of a 'tournament feel', as did the presence of arbiters Alex McFarlane and Shohreh Bayat.

I found it extremely helpful to use the board for analytical purposes, constantly switching between my laptop and the board to try and generate new ideas and check that I hadn't missed anything in my calculations. The games were carefully monitored – we were required to share our screen on a zoom call, and a camera was placed at the front of the room to ensure that the positions on our boards were identical to the actual games, thus prohibiting any actual analysis from taking place.

The only downside to the tournament was a personal one. I finished my final university exam the day before the event started, meaning I had pretty much zero preparation time. To add to this, every England player was in the bottom half of the draw, and thus we all faced stronger opponents in the first round.

**F.Bindrich-R.Haria**
Round 1; Game 1
*Reti Opening*

**1 c4 e6 2 g3**

This was already a surprise. Given the amount of time we'd had to prepare for this game, I'd expected Falko to play 2 d4, attempting to find a hole in my repertoire. Nevertheless, 2 g3 still offers the potential to transpose to a mainline Catalan later down the line.

**2...d5 3 ♗g2 ♘f6**

Of course, 3...dxc4 and 3...d4 are fine options, but having already been surprised, I decided to just play as solidly as possible.

**4 ♘f3 ♗e7 5 0-0 0-0 6 b3**

The second surprise, although the move is a main line in its own right. However, I think it was the first time my opponent had played this line in a published game.

Instead, 6 d4 transposes to a typical Catalan position. After 6...dxc4 Falko had had a few games continuing 7 ♘e5 ♘c6 8 ♘xc6 bxc6 9 ♘a3, which leads to its own theoretical battleground.

**6...b6 7 ♗b2 ♗b7 8 e3 c5 9 d3**

This seemed a bit passive. Both 9 ♘c3 and 9 ♕e2 are more popular, and probably end up transposing into each other along the way.

**9...♕c8**

I like putting my queen on c8 in these positions. It defends the b7-bishop in case

we ever want to capture on c4, and enables our f8-rook to come to d8. Obviously 9...♕c7 was also possible, but it can sometimes get hit on this square by ideas such as ♘b5 or ♗e5.

**10 ♘bd2?!**

It seems a bit harsh to label such a natural move as 'dubious'; rather, this is aimed at White's whole game plan following this move. In general, I think his next few moves were a bit too passive, and allowed me to take over the initiative.

**10...♘c6 11 ♕e2 ♕c7!**

Now that White's knight doesn't stand on c3, I may as well bring my queen to c7 and allow my a8-rook to come to d8.

**12 a3**

Continuing with the passive theme. Instead, something like 12 d4 cxd4 13 ♘xd4 ♘xd4 14 ♗xd4 looks very equal, but I guess my opponent didn't want to simplify so quickly.

**12...♖ad8 13 ♖ad1 ♖fe8 14 ♘e1**

Preparing a pawn push to f4, but the attempt to complicate things only favours Black.

**14...e5 15 f4 exf4 16 gxf4**

Planning to meet 16...d4 with 17 e4. Instead, 16 ♖xf4 is undesirable when my plan was just to play 16...d4 17 e4 ♗c8. White's dark-squared bishop is completely out of the game, and his pieces look completely uncoordinated.

**16...d4!**

White's idea fails for tactical reasons.

**17 e4 ♗d6!**

**18 e5**

18 ♕f3 was the only move, where Black has to be very accurate to achieve an advantage: 18...♗c8!, forcing White to play 19 h3, preventing him from unravelling with ♗h3 and ♘g2, and then 19... ♖e6!. Again, it's difficult to understand some engine moves, but I'll try. We're never scared of White pushing his pawn to e5, as the piece sacrifice is always advantageous for Black. Instead, the idea is to double rooks on the e-file, before playing ...g7-g6 and ...♘h5. White's pieces are generally so badly coordinated that the position is practically close to lost: for example, 20 ♗c1 ♖de8 21 ♖f2 g6! 22 ♘f1 ♘h5 followed by 23...♖f6.

Instead, after 18 ♕f3, 18...♘e7 was what I had planned to play. I threaten both ...♘f5 and ...♘g6, which I had assumed was basically impossible to defend. I was wrong: 19 ♗h3! ♘g6 20 ♘g2! when White is just about holding on, but the position remains extremely complex. For example, the engine has a crazy idea of playing ...♖f8, ...♘xe4 and ...f7-f5 next, with an evaluation of '0.00'.

*Under the watchful eye of arbiter Alex McFarlane (Shohreh Bayat was also on duty at Elstree, and behind the camera here), Ravi Haria waits for his opponent's move, ready to copy it on the board.*

**18...♘xe5 19 fxe5 ♖xe5 20 ♘e4**

Anything else loses on the spot to a rook switch along the fifth rank.

**20...♘xe4 21 ♗xe4**

21 dxe4 was easier to refute: 21...♖de8 22 ♗c1 ♖xe4! (essentially a rook sacrifice, but the bishop-pair is worth more here) 23 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 24 ♕h5 g6 25 ♕h3 h5!. I was pretty confident that this position was close to winning, and the engine agrees. There are multiple ideas such as ...♖g4+ and ...♗c8, and White doesn't have a good defence to cope with everything.

**21...♕e7?**

A very strange decision. This move threatens ...f7-f5, and prevents ♕g2 due to ...♖g5. However, the game continuation hands White far too much counterplay – essentially Black obtains a much inferior version of 21...♖de8.

Having already understood that a rook sacrifice looked extremely attractive, I'm not sure why I turned the 21...♖de8 option down. After 22 ♕g2 (or 22 ♘f3 ♖xe4! 23 dxe4 ♖xe4 24 ♕g2 ♕d7! when White can't cope with the array of threats and 25 h3 ♖e6! and 26...♖g6 will be curtains; here it's also noteworthy that 22...♗xe4 is good for Black too, and if 23 dxe4 ♖xe4 24 ♕g2 f5!) 22...♖xe4 23 dxe4 ♖e6! Black is winning. It's disappointing that I missed this opportunity to end the game so quickly.

**22 ♘f3 f5 23 ♘xe5 fxe4**

I thought that my pawns were extremely powerful, especially with the forthcoming ...e4-e3, but opening the f-file also grants White enough activity to bail out with a draw.

**24 ♖f7?!**

I was very surprised that my opponent didn't take the draw (24 ♘f7 is just a forced draw, after 24...e3 25 ♕g4 e2 26 ♘h6+ ♔h8 27 ♘f7+ ♔g8), as the position which results from this move seems practically quite difficult for White.

**24...♕g5+ 25 ♕g2 ♕xg2+ 26 ♔xg2 ♗a8**

The previous moves were all pretty much forced, after which we reach this really interesting ending. White is still a rook up, but my pawn chain with the soon-to-be-played ...e4–e3+, coupled with the bishop-pair, offers me tremendous compensation. White's dark-squared bishop is also completely out of the game.

**27 ♖f5**

27 ♖d7 is inadequate for White after 27...♖xd7 28 ♘xd7 e3+ 29 ♔g1 ♗f3! 30 ♖c1 ♗g4. The knight is trapped, and Black has excellent chances to win this endgame. 27 ♖xa7 is another option, but after 27...♗xe5 28 ♖xa8 ♖xa8 29 dxe4 it's obvious that Black has much the better chances here too.

**27...g6 28 ♖g5**

28 ♘f7 was the critical move to check: 28...e3+ 29 ♔g1 (in the game I thought 29 ♔h3 was most accurate, but after 29...gxf5 30 ♘xd8 f4 my pawns are simply too powerful) 29...gxf5 30 ♘xd8 f4. The difference compared to 29 ♔h3 is that White's king won't be caught 'offside' when I eventually advance my f-pawn to f2: 31 ♘e6 (White's defence revolves around an eventual sacrifice on d4) 31...f3 32 ♖b1 (prophylaxis against Black's idea of ...f2+, followed by ...♗f3 and ...♗g4) 32...f2+ 33 ♔f1 ♗xh2.

The line has basically been forced until this position, where White has a choice. It's evident that White's king stands better on f1 than h3, and he needs to decide the right moment to capture on d4 and start advancing his queenside pawns. At the same time, Black will basically be trying to play something like ...♗f3 and ...♗g3. The immediate 34 ♘xd4 doesn't ease White's difficulties, as shown by 34...cxd4 35 ♗xd4 ♗f4 36 ♔e2 ♗g2 followed by centralising my king. It seems difficult to come up with a plan for White; meanwhile, I can at the very least just advance my h-pawn. However, 34 ♔e2 ♗g2 also looks fairly hopeless for White. I'll cut my analysis short here, but the more I looked at this position, the harder it was to find anything which didn't lose for White.

**28...e3+ 29 ♔g1**

I expected 29 ♔h3, with the idea of ♖dg1 and ♘xg6. After 29...♔g7 30 ♖dg1 ♔f6! (hopefully I would have found this idea in the game) 31 ♘xg6 hxg6 32 ♖xg6+ ♔f5! 33 ♖6g5+ ♔f4! remarkably the king is extremely safe here – White's king is in more danger. After 34 ♖g8 ♖xg8 35 ♖xg8 ♔f3!! 36 ♖xa8 e2 37 ♖e8 ♗f4 followed by ...♔f2 Black wins.

**29...♖e8!**

Setting a trap.

**30 ♘g4?**

The final mistake. 30 ♘xg6 was White's only chance. I thought 30...hxg6 31 ♖xg6+ ♔f7 32 ♖xd6 ♖g8+ 33 ♔f1 ♖g2 was close to winning for Black, due to my threat of ...♗f3 and ...e2+, but it turns out White has a definite resource: 34 ♗xd4! e2+ 35 ♔e1 exd1♕+ 36 ♔xd1 cxd4 37 ♖xd4 ♔e6. Black is still pressing, but White has pretty decent defensive chances.

**30...♗f4 31 ♘f6+ ♔f7 32 ♘xe8 e2!**

A really nice move. I'm two rooks down, but White has to sacrifice both rooks to prevent ...♗e3#, and the resulting minor piece endgame is completely winning for Black.

**33 ♖f1 exf1♕+ 34 ♔xf1 ♗xg5 35 ♘c7 ♗c6 36 ♘b5 a6 0-1**

## R.Haria-F.Bindrich
Round 1; Game 2
*Sicilian Moscow*

**1 e4**

As I now only needed a draw, this was the most logical first move. My opponent's repertoire comprised of 1...e5 and the Najdorf – and the fact that he needed to win made it extremely likely that he'd play a Sicilian.

**1...c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♗b5+**

I was also quite fortunate that in the past year, I've started writing a book series on the Anti-Sicilians, so it was an easy decision to avoid 3 d4.

**3...♘d7 4 a4**

Part of my preparation, having noted that my opponent liked to gain counterattacking chances with ...a7-a6 and ...b7-b5 ideas. Therefore, I thought 4 a4 was the most pragmatic choice, to frustrate his counterplay.

**4...a6 5 ♗e2 ♘gf6 6 ♘c3 b6 7 d4 cxd4 8 ♕xd4**

It might seem strange that I've delayed playing the d2-d4 pawn break, and now recaptured with my queen. The point is that I've waited for Black to place his pawns on a6 and b6. The plan now for White is to continue with ♗e3 and ♘d2-c4, attempting to target these 'weaknesses'.

**8...♗b7 9 0-0 e6**

9...e5 is the other main line.

**10 ♖d1 ♕c7 11 ♗e3 ♗e7?!**

Quite a strange decision, arguably inferior to the alternative, which would have made the game a lot more complex. 11...♘g4! is Black's best try, basically preventing White from enacting his idea of ♘d2-c4 and hitting the b6- and d6-pawns. The line may continue 12 ♗g5 h6 13 ♗h4 ♘ge5 potentially followed by ...♖c8 and even ...g7-g5. It's clear that this was a better option for Black in a must-win scenario.

**12 ♘d2 0-0 13 ♘c4 e5**

13...d5 is Black's other option, but I think White should have a small edge: for example, 14 exd5 ♘xd5 15 ♘xd5 ♗xd5 16 ♗f4 ♕c6 17 ♘e3.

**14 ♕d2!**

It seems strange to give this move an exclamation mark, as it's clearly inferior to 14 ♕d3. Nevertheless, I thought it gave Black an impossible choice. As the variations will demonstrate, capturing on e4 simplifies the game too much to attain any realistic winning chances, yet anything else enables me to push f2-f3, after which I will have achieved excellent central control.

14 ♕d3 is the objectively better move. The plan for White now is to consolidate with ♗f3 and ♕e2, keeping control of the important d5-square. 14...♘c5 is the most important move to check, but White will emerge with an advantage after 15 ♗xc5 dxc5 16 ♕f3! followed by ♘e3.

**14...♖fd8**

14...♗xe4 (and not 14...♘xe4? 15 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 16 ♘xd6) is the only move to prevent White from acquiring a significant advantage. Yet relinquishing the light squares was clearly antithetical to my opponent's objectives. After 15 ♘xe4 ♘xe4 16 ♕b4 ♘ec5 17 ♗xc5! dxc5 18 ♕c3 Black is a pawn up, but White's piece activity and control of the light squares, combined with Black's weak queenside pawns, ensured that I was confident that I would basically be playing for two results here.

**15 f3 ♖ab8 16 a5?**

A typical idea to break through on the queenside, but it also grants Black unnecessary counterplay. 16 ♗f2! is the simplest option. It's important to realise that Black has basically zero ideas. He can't manoeuvre any of his pieces due to his weak a6-, b6- and d-pawns, so essentially he has nothing to do: for example: 16...h6 17 ♗f1 ♘h5 18 ♕e1! followed by something like ♘e3, or even doubling the rooks on the d-file with ♖d2.

**16...b5 17 ♘b6 ♗c6 18 ♘cd5 ♗xd5 19 ♘xd5**

19 exd5 is still good enough for a nice advantage, but I didn't want to entertain Black's exchange sacrifice after 19...♘xb6 20 ♗xb6 ♖xb6 21 axb6 ♕xb6+ 22 ♔h1.

**19...♘xd5 20 exd5**

I presumed that I was doing very well here. My whole plan revolved around continuing with b2-b4, ♖ac1, and c2–c4, after which Black's queenside would collapse, and I couldn't find a way for Black to prevent this. As it turns out, I completely misevaluated the position.

**20...♖dc8?**

I completely missed 20...♗f6!. Black prepares an ...e5-e4 push, and I can't really stop it: 21 c3 ♖e8 followed by ...♘c5. Compared to the game, it's unclear what my plan is – for the moment, queenside expansion seems unlikely.

**21 ♖ac1 ♕d8?**

Black simply can't allow me to play b2-b4 and c2-c4, so 21...♕b7 22 b4 ♗d8 23 c3 was indicated. White is still fractionally better, and I knew that there was little risk in this position, but it will also be a very difficult task to make a breakthrough.

**22 b4!**

Now Black can't prevent the opening-up of the queenside with the forthcoming c2-c4, and is probably just close to lost now.

**22...h6 23 c4 bxc4 24 ♗xc4 ♖a8 25 ♗e2!**

Preparing an invasion on the c6-square.

**25...♖xc1 26 ♖xc1 ♗g5 27 ♗xg5 hxg5 28 ♖c6 e4**

Attempting to find some counterplay, but I had enough time to calculate all the relevant lines and realise that there was little danger in the position.

**29 fxe4 ♘e5 30 ♖xa6 ♖c8 31 b5**

If Black leaves his rook on c8, I can confidently sacrifice an exchange with ♖c6.

**31...♖c5 32 ♗f1 g4 33 b6 ♕c8 34 ♖a7 ♔h7 35 ♕f2 g6 36 b7 1-0**

Having hardly studied chess for the previous few months due to university, I was pleasantly surprised to have beaten a near-2600 player 2-0. Amongst my English colleagues, Marcus played a superb game against Zdenko Kozul to level his match, before sadly losing the rapid play-off. Simon also outplayed his strong opponent, Samvel Ter-Sahakyan, in their first game, and was unfortunate not to win, before pressing too hard in the second and thus losing the match overall.

In the second round, I was paired against the former 2700 player Ernesto Inarkiev. Unlike the actual World Cup, the tournament did not have rest days between each round, and thus my lack of preparation led me to choose the solid Scotch Four Knights. I was confident in my ability to hold a draw in both classical games, and felt like the rapid play-offs offered decent chances for a shock result. Reaching an equal ending in the first game, my attempt to press dramatically backfired.

**R.Haria-E.Inarkiev**
Round 2; Game 1
*Scotch Four Knights*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 d4 exd4 5 ♘xd4 ♗b4 6 ♘xc6 bxc6 7 ♗d3 d5 8 exd5 0-0 9 0-0 cxd5 10 h3 ♖e8 11 ♕f3 c6 12 ♗f4 ♗e6 13 a3?!**

The move itself isn't an inaccuracy, but I don't know why I didn't just play 13 ♘e2 immediately.

**13...♗d6 14 ♖fe1**

14 b4!? is the most logical continuation after my thirteenth move. If Black wants to advance ...c6-c5, he must deal with an IQP. Meanwhile, the likely exchange of dark-squared bishops will weaken the c5-square. The position is still completely equal, but there are some fairly obvious positional ideas for White. 14...a5! is the critical move to consider when 15 ♖ab1 axb4 16 axb4 ♕c7 17 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 18 ♘e2 is roughly level.

**14...♕c7 15 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 16 ♘e2?!**

16 b4! was preferable, preventing Black from expanding with ...c6-c5: 16...a5 17 b5!? cxb5 (or 17...c5 18 ♖ad1) 18 ♘xb5 ♕c5 19 a4. The position remains equal, but it's feasible to imagine White gaining some chances to press in the future.

**16...c5**

Black is slowly taking over the initiative, and I failed to play accurately here.

**17 ♘f4?!**

17 ♘g3 (restricting the mobility of Black's bishop) 17...c4 18 ♗f1 d4 didn't look particularly appealing during the game. Nevertheless, it was the preferable alternative to what happened: for example, after 19 b3! cxb3 20 cxb3 a5 21 ♖ed1 ♖ab8 22 ♗c4 I don't think that White has any problems.

**17...c4 18 ♗f1**

18 ♘xe6 is recommended by the engine, but I felt like this would cause me even more practical problems after 18...fxe6 19 ♗f1 e5 20 ♖ad1 ♖ac8.

**18...♗f5 19 c3**

19 b3 was also possible, where I essentially sacrifice a pawn to gain a foothold in the position: 19...♖xe1 20 ♖xe1 cxb3 21 cxb3 ♗e4 22 ♕e3 ♕xa3.

**19...♗e4 20 ♕g3 ♖eb8?**

20...♕b6! removes the queen from any tactical possibilities, and Black has very good control here: 21 ♖e2 h6 22 ♖ae1 ♖e5! with a pleasant edge.

**21 ♖ad1!**

Threatening ♘xd5, and enabling me to unravel my rooks by defending the b2-pawn

*Russian international and former European Champion Ernesto Inarkiev proved too strong.*

with ♖d2.

**21...♕c5**

21...♖xb2 22 ♘xd5 ♕xg3 23 ♘xf6+ gxf6 24 fxg3 f5 25 g4 is level.

**22 ♖d2 ♖b6 23 ♕e3**

A trade of queens is beneficial for White, as Black won't be able to continue defending the d5-pawn.

**23...♕xe3 24 ♖xe3 ♖ab8 25 f3 g5 26 ♘h5 ♘xh5 27 fxe4 dxe4 28 ♖xe4 ♖xb2 29 ♖xb2 ♖xb2 30 ♖xc4**

Reaching an interesting ending. White has been slightly worse the whole game, but suddenly we reach a position where only I can win. The bishop is more powerful than Black's knight, and the fact that I have a passed c-pawn gives me good chances to play on both sides of the board.

**30...♖b7 31 ♔f2 ♘f6 32 ♖b4 ♖c7 33 c4 ♘e4+ 34 ♔e3 ♘c5 35 ♔d4 ♔f8 36 ♖b5 ♘e6+ 37 ♔c3 h6 38 ♗d3?!**

38 ♗e2 was a much better way of activating my bishop.

**38...♘f4 39 ♗e4 ♖e7 40 ♗f3?**

The start of the crumble, which can only really be explained by tiredness. I started to really struggle with basic calculation, which becomes pretty apparent over the next few moves. 40 ♗b7! is slightly in White's favour.

**40...♖e3+ 41 ♔b4 ♘d3+**

I missed this check. I had assumed 41...♘xh3 was his idea, but after 42 c5 Black will struggle to stop the c-pawn.

**42 ♔a5 ♘e1 43 ♖b8+**

43 ♗d5 is the most logical continuation, as my bishop will always be more powerful than his knight: 43...♖xa3+ 44 ♔b4 ♘c2+ 45 ♔c5 ♘e3 46 ♖b8+ ♔g7 47 ♖b7 holds.

**43...♔e7 44 c5?**

I think this is the losing move, even if it isn't immediately obvious to the engines. I simply missed that Black can capture on a3 with check, before capturing both the f3- and h3-pawns.

**44...♘xf3 45 ♖b7+ ♔e6 46 gxf3 ♖xa3+ 47 ♔b4 ♖xf3 48 ♖xa7 ♖xh3**

Black's plan is easy – advance his kingside pawns, and sacrifice his rook for my c-pawn at the right moment. I tried to find some tricks, but to no avail.

**49 ♖a6+ ♔e5 50 ♖a1 ♖h2 51 ♖e1+ ♔f4 52 ♖f1+ ♔g3 53 ♖xf7 h5 54 ♖f5 ♔g4 55 ♖d5 ♖b2+ 56 ♔c3 ♖b7 57 ♔d4 h4 58 ♔e5 h3 59 ♖d4+ ♔g3 60 ♖d3+ ♔h4 61 ♖d4+ g4 62 c6 ♖b8 63 c7 ♖c8 64 ♔f5 h2 65 ♖d7 ♔h3 0-1**

In any match scenario, losing the first game with White is always incredibly difficult to recover from, and this was no exception. Inarkiev showed his class in the second game, restricting all of my counterplay and convincingly beating me to win 2-0 overall.

I entered the Hybrid event with curiosity and bit of scepticism – surely this couldn't be the solution to the return of tournament chess? After all, nothing can compare to the atmosphere of real life over-the-board chess; the psychology involved as you study your opponent's body language; the ability to travel and visit new places. However, despite the obvious downsides of hybrid chess, I was struck by how similar it felt to an actual tournament. This was in no small part down to the excellent tournament organisation of Malcolm and the tireless work of arbiters Alex and Shohreh, who did an amazing job to make us feel as comfortable as possible, despite the uniqueness of the situation.

I'm excited to return to over-the-board chess as soon as possible, but for as long as Covid remains a dangerous threat, it appears that Hybrid events are the next best solution.

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Chess
IT'S NEPO!
Magnus Carlsen will face his childhood nemesis Ian Nepomniachtchi for the World Chess Championship this November
in Dubai after the Russian no.1 won the Candidates with a round to spare

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# An All-Night Slog

## Chess players are renowned for being night owls, but such skills were required to do well in the ECF's 24-hour blitz fest that was Checkmate Covid - The Rematch

The ECF were well supported by the chess world as they staged Checkmate Covid – The Rematch for 24 hours, play beginning at 5pm on Saturday 5th June and concluding at 5pm the next day. The live commentary was begun by Mickey Adams in tandem with Shohreh Bayat, with other commentators including such big names as Julian Hodgson, Gawain Jones, Daniel King, Sarah and Alex Longson, Luke McShane and David Norwood, as well as regular ECF live stream hosts Natasha Regan and Matthew Sadler, while MMA fighter Julio Calcina streamed for the whole 24 hours.

Over £5,000 was raised for the British Red Cross with the blitz marathon won by Keith Arkell who clocked up a huge 655 points, with 12-year-old Shreyas Royal back on 522. We caught up with the winner.

**Did you do any specific preparation for the marathon?**

*Over the past 15 months I've played many marathon blitz sessions over the internet just for fun, and often all day and half of the night, and so in doing so I inadvertently trained myself for this one. My intention was to just keep going and going until all the opposition lost its will to compete with me. I think what clinched it was when I won 44 games in a row during a four hour stretch in the night. My other policy was to play almost instantly the whole time. This saved on energy and enabled me to play far more games.*

**Presumably it was very tiring?**

*I didn't find it tough at all, to be absolutely honest. I just relaxed, sat back and got into a nice rhythm. I clocked off after 21 hours' continuous play and, at 2pm on the Sunday, switched immediately to the 2-hour ECF Blitz Grand Prix on Lichess. I am actually well in front in both the Blitz and Rapid Grand Prix, and have ambitions to win both.*

**This wasn't your first chess marathon, was it?**

*I think I've played a couple of over-the-board 24-hour blitz marathons and one at rapid. Danny Gormally and I played a blitz 24-hour tournament at Le Mans (of course!) and we were both absolutely shattered by the end. I remember we went to eat afterwards rather than immediately sleeping, and we were both hallucinating in the restaurant.*

*The bottom line is that I always enjoy such challenges and will continue to seek them out, ditto simuls, where I never impose a limit on numbers. For example, I played about 55 players a few years ago in an OTB simul against the very strong Warwick University, ably organised by Louise Head, and a few days before this marathon I managed 33/33 in a simul as part of the ECF festival.*

*Keith Arkell had plenty to be pleased about as he won the British Red Cross fundraising marathon, despite skipping the final three hours.*

**K.Arkell-T.Cox**
Checkmate Covid Blitz 2021
*Ragozin Defence*

**1 d4 d5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♘c3 ♗b4 6 ♕a4+ ♘c6 7 ♗g5 h6 8 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 9 e3 0-0 10 a3 ♗xc3+ 11 bxc3 ♕g6 12 g3!?**

Deviating from 12 ♖c1 with which Keith was successful in Arkell-Ward, Aberystwyth 2014 – a game you can find in one of the best-selling books of the past year, *Arkell's Endings*.

**12...♗g4 13 ♗g2 ♕f5 14 ♕d1 ♗h3 15 0-0 ♗xg2 16 ♔xg2 ♕e4**

Instead, 16...♘a5!? 17 ♘d2 ♕d7! prevents ♕a4 and feels quite comfortable for Black who will arrange ...c5.

**17 ♕b1! ♕xb1 18 ♖fxb1!?**

A slightly mysterious recapture when 18 ♖axb1 b6 19 ♘d2 ♘a5 20 ♖fc1 followed by c3-c4 was available and an edge.

**18...b6 19 ♘d2 ♘a5 20 ♖b4 ♖ac8 21 c4 dxc4 22 ♘xc4 ♘xc4?**

Both here and on the last move, Black wouldn't have faced any problems after 22...c5!, that is bar having to face a master of rook endings in one.

**23 ♖xc4 c5**

Too late.

**24 ♖ac1 ♖c6 25 dxc5 ♖fc8?**

What had Black overlooked?

**26 cxb6! ♖xc4 27 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 28 b7 1-0**

# He's Back!

## Out of form? Certainly no longer as Magnus Carlsen won back-to-back Tour titles

In truth he never went away, but Magnus Carlsen was still delighted to win back-to-back events in the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour. Back in November when the Tour began, Carlsen was defeated by Wesley So in the final, that same scenario occurring at the Opera Euro Rapid. In-between there was, of course, the Airthings Masters, where an off-colour Carlsen was sensationally dispatched by the in-form Daniil Dubov at the quarter-final stage.

Come March and the champ's signature event, the Magnus Carlsen Invitational, Carlsen would be eliminated by Ian Nepomniachtchi in a dramatic blitz play-off ahead of rallying to crush So in the ensuing third-place play-off. That left Carlsen second in the overall standings, but boy have things improved for the champ since then, who now leads the Tour with 271 points to So's 203.

Carlsen was back in the groove at the New in Chess Classic, pretty much dominating from beginning to end, as we'll see in detail later in these pages. He wasn't in first gear in the subsequent FTX Crypto Cup, but still fought through to reach the final, where he described gaining revenge over So as a "massive, massive relief".

The champ proved too strong for Hikaru Nakamura in the New in Chess final, but required a blitz play-off to get by his old rival in the quarter-finals of the FTX Crypto Cup, where the pick of his wins was arguably the following.

**M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura**
FTX Crypto Cup 2021
*Giuoco Piano*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 0-0 ♘f6 5 d3 0-0 6 h3 h6 7 c3 d6 8 ♖e1 a5 9 d4**

Upping the ante.

**9...♗b6 10 ♗e3 exd4**

The right way to react. 10...♘xe4?! 11 dxe5 favours White.

**11 cxd4 d5!**

And again, especially as 11...♘xe4?? 12 d5 would win a piece thanks to the loose knight on e4.

**12 exd5 ♘e7 13 ♘c3 ♘exd5 14 ♕d2**

**14...c6**

An engine-approved novelty, Nakamura having previously come under pressure after 14...♘xe3 15 ♖xe3 c6 16 ♖d1 ♘d5 17 ♘xd5 cxd5 18 ♗b3 ♗f5 19 ♘e5 in Caruana-Nakamura, Carlsen Invitational 2020, where he was able to hold. Note too that 14...♗f5? wouldn't be wise: 15 ♗xh6! gxh6 16 ♕xh6 when ♖e5 will be a killer. Likewise, 14...♗e6? 15 ♗xh6! gxh6 16 ♕xh6 is one to avoid.

**15 ♗xh6!?**

A practical choice. Carlsen must have been aware that Black was now OK with best play, but was quite happy to test Nakamura's recollection of his earlier analysis.

**15...gxh6 16 ♕xh6 ♗f5?**

The decisive mistake. Black needed to play 16...♘h7! to prevent ♘g5 when 17 ♘e4!? (17 ♘xd5 cxd5 18 ♗d3 f5 has to be OK for Black and receives the standard '0.00' from the engines) 17...♗f5 18 ♘g3 ♗g6 19 ♘h5 ♗xh5 20 ♕xh5 ♕f6 21 ♖e4 ♘f4 22 ♕g4+ ♘g6 23 h4 ♔h8 (Pein) leaves White with definite compensation, but is objectively no more than unclear.

**17 ♖e5 ♗g6 18 ♖g5**

Carlsen is content to pin. 18 ♘h4!? would also have been very strong, and if 18...♗xd4 19 ♘xg6 fxg6 20 ♘xd5! cxd5 21 ♖g5 with a devastating attack.

**18...♘h7 19 ♖g4 ♖e8**

Freeing f8 for the knight, but Black's position is going to implode on g6 at some point in any case.

**20 ♘xd5 cxd5 21 ♗d3 ♘f8 22 ♘e5 ♖e6 23 ♗f5 ♖d6 24 ♘xg6 fxg6 25 ♗xg6 ♖xg6 26 ♖xg6+ ♘xg6 27 ♕xg6+ ♔h8 28 ♕h5+! ♔g8 29 ♕g4+ ♔h7**

29...♔f7 30 ♖e1 would also have decisively brought up the reserves, and if 30...♕f6 31 ♖e5.

**30 ♖e1 ♖c8 31 ♖e6 1-0**

*Raw emotion. Magnus's relief is clear as he battled back from losing the first blitz play-off game to defeat big online rival Wesley So in the final of the FTX Crypto Cup. Carlsen changed his t-shirt ahead of the second blitz game (see page 49), which he won and then also the Armageddon.*

# The Scandic *Revenge*

**Magnus Carlsen not only won the FTX Crypto Cup, but en route he played a fine Nimzo-Larsen Attack which reminded John Henderson of another classic encounter**

If revenge is a dish best eaten cold, then Magnus Carlsen likes to serve his up in a traditional Scandic way, as a frozen herring, with an extra large dollop of ice on top. At the recent FTX Crypto Cup, the world champion turned on the style with a mesmerising miniature that went a long way to avenge an equally famous Scandic brotherhood flank opening defeat.

Carlsen went on to claim victory in the FTX Crypto Cup by beating Wesley So in the final, but it almost wasn't the case, as he somewhat surprisingly barely managed to make the cut into the business end of the eight-player knockout stages, his sluggish prelims tournament saved by a stroke of outrageous good fortune in the final round against Teimour Radjabov.

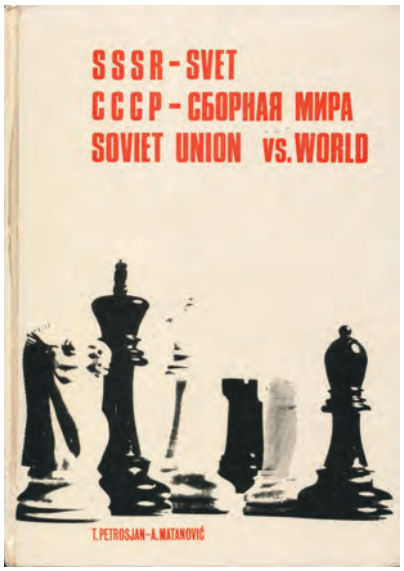
It was a roller coaster ride for Carlsen in the prelims – but one game stood out as a 'modern masterpiece'. That occurred in round 8, against Alexander Grischuk, with a Nimzo-Larsen Attack that 51 years later went a long way to avenge arguably the most famous game from the annals with 1 b3: the second Larsen-Spassky encounter from the 1970 USSR vs Rest of the World Match held in Belgrade, that was rightly billed as 'The Match of the Century'.

With its impeccable Scandic roots, the Nimzo-Larsen Attack was first popularised by the adopted Dane Aaron Nimzowitsch, but the flank opening only dramatically came to popular attention through the late 1960s and early '70s thanks to the great Dane himself, Bent Larsen, one of the world's best players of the era.

And as a newcomer to chess in the early '70s, Spassky's masterpiece against Larsen was everywhere: newspaper columns, every chess magazine and several best game anthologies of the period. It's a game that never ceases to fill me with wonder and bring a smile to my face. But here's the thing about that game: although this is the one game of Larsen's that is remembered from that epoch-defining match – and some would even argue the most memorable game of the whole match – many have conveniently forgotten that Larsen scored 2½ out of 3 in his other games (with Leonid Stein replacing Spassky on top board in game 4).

And to be able to put Carlsen's game properly into context, I make no excuses for reliving my lost youth by showing that epic Larsen-Spassky encounter once again in this magazine – even if only to revel in Spassky's brutal takedown of one of his main title rivals with a breathtakingly ballsy rook sacrifice and one crazy pawn move that would be the key to this aesthetically pleasing 17-move chess miniature.

Coincidentally, this was also a game and a match I thoroughly enjoyed revisiting last year by reading through Chess Informant's *The Match of the Century USSR vs World: 50th Anniversary Edition*. Internationally renowned chess historian Douglas Griffin and Igor Žvegli have readapted the original text from the first edition written by Tigran Petrosian and Alexander Matanovic (*SSSR – SVET Soviet Union vs World*), while adding new content not available at the time of the first edition's publication.




**B.Larsen-B.Spassky**
USSR vs. Rest of the World, Belgrade 1970
*Nimzo-Larsen Attack*

**1 b3 e5 2 ♗b2 ♘c6 3 c4 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 e4 5 ♘d4 ♗c5 6 ♘xc6?!**

The only thing this achieves is to gift Spassky quick development. And it was after this Larsen debacle that no grandmaster played the opening in this way for White again.

**6...dxc6 7 e3 ♗f5 8 ♕c2 ♕e7 9 ♗e2 0-0-0 10 f4?**

Black, of course, can't take the pawn en passant, as the bishop on f5 is hanging. Now admittedly f2-f4 fits in well with the Nimzo-Larsen philosophy, but it offers Spassky the last tempo he needs for his brutal takedown of one of his leading title rivals.

**10...♘g4!**

At his peak, Spassky wasn't one to hold back – he goes straight for the jugular.

**11 g3?**

Larsen's last two moves have been bad, but kudos to Spassky for exploiting the brace of blunders brilliantly.

**11...h5 12 h3 h4! 13 hxg4 hxg3 14 ♖g1 ♖h1!!**

After sacrificing a piece, Spassky throws a whole rook on the fire just for the sake of one tempo – and it is this move that elevates the game to a historic level in the annals.

**15 ♖xh1 g2**

The crucial tempo is an absolute, as when Larsen's rook moves, Spassky's queen invades with lethal force.

**16 ♖f1**

No better is 16 ♖g1 as it crashes to

*A classic scene from the famous 1970 USSR vs Rest of the World match. Boris Spassky takes a break from facing Bent Larsen to catch up on the board 2 duel, Petrosian against Fischer.*

16...♗xe3! and White can resign.
**16...♕h4+ 17 ♔d1 gxf1♕+ 0-1**

And Larsen resigned as it is a mate in three after 18 ♗xf1 ♗xg4+ 19 ♔c1 ♕e1+ 20 ♕d1 ♕xd1#.

As I mentioned above, in the aftermath of that fabled game, no one-one dared to play the way Larsen did with 3 c4 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 e4 5 ♘d4 – that was until the recent FTX Crypto Cup with the same opening that also involved the reigning world champion and best Scandic player in the world, meting out the same brutal punishment to a Russian over half a century later to finally exact Larsen's defeat.

**M.Carlsen-A.Grischuk**
FTX Crypto Cup (rapid) 2021
*Nimzo-Larsen Attack*

**1 b3 e5 2 ♗b2 ♘c6 3 c4 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 e4 5 ♘d4 ♗c5 6 ♘f5!**

Carlsen plays it in a more combative way than Larsen when he lost his epic miniature against Spassky. This is the move that could well reevaluate that old Larsen-Spassky infamous line.
**6...d5**

As popularised by Spassky. The safe move is arguably 6...0-0!?, but intriguingly, only the week before this game, in the 2nd Mr Dodgy Invitational, we witnessed a shock brevity between Adhiban and Navara that went 7 e3 d5 8 cxd5 ♘xd5?? 9 ♕g4 and Black resigned, overlooking that 9...g6 allows 10 ♘h6#.
**7 ♘xg7+!?**

This is all seat of your pants stuff. But Carlsen may well have seen the Adhiban-Navara debacle – coupled with his keen sense of historic games, being well aware of that Larsen-Spassky encounter – and looks as if he could well have 'crunched' this with his team and their high-level engines, to extract some Scandic revenge with the Nimzo-Larsen Attack on a Russian.
**7...♔f8 8 cxd5 ♗d4 9 ♘c3! ♘e7**

Black can't snatch the d-pawn. After 9...♘xd5?! 10 ♘h5 ♕g5 11 e3 ♗g4 12 ♕c1! ♕xh5 13 ♘xd5 ♕xd5 14 exd4 he is in trouble with ♗c4 coming next.
**10 e3 ♗xc3 11 dxc3 ♔xg7 12 c4**

Black has an extra piece, but Carlsen has excellent compensation with two pawns and a strong bishop with an almost eternal pin down the long a1-h8 diagonal. You get the feeling that Larsen would have been proud of his Scandic brother's dynamic play.
**12...♘g6 13 g4!**

Grischuk just gets no chance to organise his pieces and his king security.
**13...h6 14 h4 c5**

He is rightly concerned about stopping Carlsen playing ♕d4 further to piling the pressure down the long diagonal. The problem Grischuk has, is that although 14...♕e7 with the plan of ...♘e5 looks sensible, there are still major problems ahead, such as 15 ♗e2 ♘e5 16 ♕d4 ♘exg4 17 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 18 f3!!.

Here, while 18...♗xf3 (it's so easy to miss that 18...exf3 loses on the spot to 19 ♕xg4+! ♔f8 20 ♕xf3, etc) 19 ♖g1+ ♔h7 20 ♕xf6 ♕xf6 21 ♗xf6 ♖hg8 22 ♔d2 ♖xg1 23 ♖xg1 ♖g8 24 ♖xg8 ♔xg8 25 ♗e5 c6 26 d6 ♔f8 27 ♗d4 a6 (if 27...b6 28 c5! b5 29 ♗g7+! and White should be winning) 28 c5 ♔e8 29 ♗g7 h5 30 ♔c3 could well be a draw with the opposite-coloured bishops, defending this will not be easy for Black, as the white king has too many entry points on both wings.
**15 ♗e2** More clinical was 15 f4!?.
**15...♔g8**

Grischuk senses the danger, but this goes down almost without a fight. The online fans were all screaming for 15...♕d6 and I am sure Carlsen would have continued again with 16 ♕c2. However, such are Black's fundamental problems here, that the engines start to show-boat with the non-human response 16 ♔d2! ♘e5 17 g5 ♘fd7 18 ♕g1! ♔h7 19 ♕g3! ♖e8 (19...♘f3+? 20 ♗xf3 ♕xg3 21 ♗xe4+ ♔g8 22 fxg3 is easily winning) 20 f4! exf3 (certainly not 20...♘g6? 21 h5 ♘ge5 22 ♖ag1 and mate is inevitable) 21 ♗d3+ ♔h8 22 ♕xf3 ♔g8 23 ♕f4 h5 24 ♖af1 and Black can't possibly hold on having to face this relentless attack.
**16 ♕c2**

Carlsen still only has the two pawns for his sacrificed piece – but Grischuk is all tied up in knots, and trying to unravel his pieces gives Carlsen the time needed to calmly bring his queen's rook into the attack.

**16...♖h7 17 0-0-0 ♘xg4**

It was either this or going down in flames with 17...♕d6 18 g5 ♘g4 19 h5 ♘xf2 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 ♖df1! ♘xh1 22 ♖f6! ♕d8 23 ♖xg6+ ♔f8 24 ♖f6+ ♔g8 25 ♗h5 ♘g3 26 ♗g6 and Black will soon succumb to the relentless pressure of the attack.

**18 h5 ♘f8 19 ♕xe4**

What's not to like here for Magnus, with two pawns for the piece and a raging attack against his opponent's king?

**19...f5**

There was a pretty queen sacrifice finish after 19...♘xf2? 20 ♖dg1+ ♘g6 21 hxg6!! ♘xe4 22 gxh7+ ♔xh7 23 ♖g7+ ♔h8 24 ♖xh6#.

**20 ♕c2 ♘xf2 21 ♖hg1+ ♔f7 22 ♖df1 ♕h4**

**23 ♗e5?!**

The only flaw in what has been an otherwise sparkling and dynamic game by the world champion. The clean, clinical kill was 23 ♖g2! and Black can consider resigning at this point.

**23...♕e4?**

Grischuk was inevitably in time trouble, but he was still in with a fighting chance had he found 23...♕e7! 24 ♕b2 ♘d7 25 ♗f4 ♘h3. That said, after 26 ♗g4! ♘xg1 (if 26...♘xf4 27 ♗xf5! ♕xe3+ 28 ♔b1 and the black king can't possibly survive) 27 ♗xf5 ♖g7 28 ♗g6+ ♔g8 29 ♖xg1 ♕f6 30 ♗xh6 in the long-run, despite for now being sans a rook, those extra pawns – and especially the h-pawn – coupled with White's active pieces, will win the day.

**24 ♕c3 ♘h3 25 ♖g4! 1-0**

After being systematically pummeled by Carlsen, under the relentless pressure Grischuk probably missed this winning move that embarrasses his queen.

From a historical prospectus, we now have two brilliant Nimzo-Larsen Attack miniatures won by two reigning world champions, involving two Scandic players and two Russians and over half a century apart. I wonder if we'll now see a three-peat in 2071?

*When he opened with 1 b3 e5 2 Bb2 ♘c6 3 c4, Magnus Carlsen must have been aware he was following in Bent Larsen's footsteps and eager to obtain inidrect revenge for the great Dane.*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# Matching Magnus

## Jonathan Pein gave it his best and might even have won on time, but ultimately the champ proved too strong when they contested two bullet games

On another typical dull lockdown Sunday night I found myself yet again wasting the night away playing bullet on Lichess. Having recently claimed the Candidate Master title, I was able to enter the Lichess bullet titled arena tournament for the first time. After beating several relatively weak players I found myself with a rather surprising pairing. I occasionally watch Magnus's stream and immediately noticed this was his username, DrNykterstein. There are several 'copycat' accounts, but at 3096 this was certainly him. The thought of playing Magnus totally freaked me out and as my heart rate increased, the quality of my chess decreased.

*It's not only Magnus who likes to deploy the Nimzo-Larsen Attack, 1 b3 being a favourite of Jonathan Pein's, although he fared rather better when Black in their second bullet encounter.*

**'Quarantinemachine' (JP) - 'DrNykterstein' (MC)**
Titled Arena, Lichess (bullet) 2021
*Nimzo-Larsen Attack*

**1 b3 b6 2 ♗b2 ♗b7 3 e3 ♘f6 4 d4 g6 5 ♘f3 ♗g7 6 ♗e2 0-0 7 0-0 d6 8 c4 ♘bd7 9 ♘c3 e5 10 dxe5 ♘xe5 11 ♘xe5**

A typical weaker player reaction and mindset. Often the weaker player seeks inaccurate swaps out of a desperate desire to remove any tension, but this often only serves to make the position worse.

**11...dxe5 12 ♗f3?**

12 ♕c2 ♕e7 13 a4 was better.

**12...e4 13 ♗e2 ♕e7 14 ♕c2 ♖ad8 15 ♖ad1**

15 a3 with a view to gain space in a relatively closed seven versus seven pawn structure would have been smarter than another cowardly exchange, and if 15...a5 16 b4.

**15...c5 16 ♘d5?**

As we can see, the patzer is desperate for yet more simplification, which only hastens his demise.

**16...♘xd5 17 cxd5 ♗xb2 18 ♕xb2 ♗xd5 19 b4?? cxb4 20 ♖d4 a5 21 ♖fd1?! ♗e6 22 ♖xe4 ♖xd1+ 23 ♗xd1 ♖d8 24 ♗b3?! ♕c5?!**

**25 ♗xe6??**

Even the final mistake as time was running out shows a longing for exchanges. Often when looking over games it is hard to understand why certain decisions were made, but here the swaps were clearly fear induced.

**25...♖d1# 0-1**

After that very trivial beating, just a few games later I amazingly found myself paired with Magnus again. It is rare to play the same opponent twice in such quick succession in these events given there are over 550 players, but to play Magnus twice so quickly was fantastic. After beating myself up over how easily he had beaten me the previous game, I was determined to make it a harder challenge for the world number one. I also noticed in the previous game, despite my quality of chess not matching the Norwegian's, that my speed wasn't so far off and I knew I could be quicker.

In these Arena tournaments the aim is to get as many points as possible and the tournament rewards you for winning several games in a row, as well as halving your time, so here Magnus decided to 'go berserk' and play with 30 seconds against my 60...

**'DrNykterstein' (MC) - 'Quarantinemachine' (JP)**
Titled Arena, Lichess (bullet) 2021
*Reti Opening*

**1 g3 g6 2 ♗g2 ♗g7 3 e3 e5 4 ♘e2 ♘e7 5 0-0 0-0 6 d4 exd4 7 exd4 d5 8 c4 c6 9 ♘bc3 dxc4**

In some King's Indian and Grünfeld lines if White is not careful you can grab this c4-

pawn. I felt with the white knights on e2 and c3, it should simply be a pawn.

**10 ♖e1 ♗e6 11 ♘f4 ♗f5 12 d5 cxd5 13 ♘fxd5 ♘xd5 14 ♕xd5 ♘c6 15 ♕xc4 ♖c8 16 ♕b3 ♘d4 17 ♕xb7 ♖b8**

17...♖c7 18 ♕a6 ♘c2 19 ♖d1 ♖d7! was even better.

**18 ♕xa7 ♘c2 19 ♗f4**

**19...♘xa1?**

Missing 19...♘xe1 20 ♗xb8 ♘xg2.

**20 ♕xb8 ♕xb8 21 ♗xb8 ♖xb8**

In all the panic and excitement of realising I was in a winning position against the world champion, as well as massively ahead on the clock, I did not slow down to find the simple intermezzo 21...♘c2!.

**22 ♖xa1 ♖xb2 23 ♘d5 ♖xf2**

23...♗b1! was another missed win.

**24 ♔xf2 ♗xa1 25 ♘e7+ ♔f8 26 ♘xf5 gxf5 27 ♗d5 ♔e7 28 a4 ♗d4+ 29 ♔f3 ♔f6 30 a5 ♗a7 31 a6**

Now the time trouble madness begins.

**31...♔g5 32 ♗b3 ♔f6 33 ♗c2 h6 34 h4 ♗b8 35 ♗d3 ♗a7 36 ♗c2 ♔e5 37 ♗d3**

Possibly due to my extremely elevated heart rate, I had a crazy idea that I would try and flag one of the world's fastest and most skilled bullet players from a dead draw. I saw my name in flashing headlights and how amusing it would be to say I've beaten the world champion at bullet... Oh, how wrong I was.

**37...f4? 38 gxf4+ ♔d4 39 ♗e4 f6 40 ♗b7!**

40 ♗h7 ♔c5 41 ♔g4 ♔b6 42 ♗d3 ♗b8 is going to be a draw. White cannot leave the f4-square and the black king would simply repeat moves guarding a7, i.e. 43 f5 ♔a7 44 ♔h5 ♗g3.

**40...♔c5 41 h5?**

41 ♔g4 is winning. Now that Black's king and bishop are stranded on the queenside, White's king can mop up the kingside pawns.

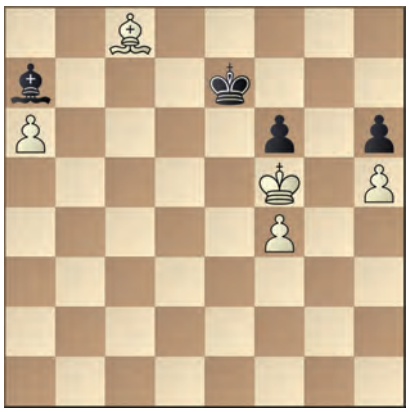
**41...♔d6**

41...♔b6 42 ♔g4 ♗b8 43 ♔f5 ♗c7 should be an easy draw.

**42 ♔g4 ♔e6??**

42...♔c7 43 ♔f5 ♗e3 44 ♗e4 ♔b6 45 ♗d3 ♔a7 was the way to hold.

**43 ♗c8+! ♔e7 44 ♔f5**



Now that White has fully activated his king, the game is over.

**44...♔f7 45 ♗b7 ♗b6 46 ♗d5+ ♔g7 47 ♔e6 ♗a7 48 f5 ♗b6 49 ♔d7 ♗a7 50 ♔c6 ♗d4 51 ♔b7 ♔f8 52 a7 ♔e7 53 a8♕ ♔d6 54 ♕c8 ♔e5 55 ♕e6+ ♔f4 56 ♗e4 ♗e5 57 ♕d5 ♔g5 58 ♔c6 ♔xh5 59 ♔d7 ♔g5 60 ♔e6 h5 61 ♕xe5 h4 62 ♕xf6+ ♔f4 63 ♕xh4+ ♔e3 64 f6 ♔e2 65 f7 ♔e3 66 f8♕ ♔e2 67 ♕f3+ ♔d2 68 ♕hf2+ ♔c1 69 ♕h1# 1-0**

With incredible speed and accuracy I was checkmated with 2.7 seconds to spare. Perhaps in the next Titled Arena I'll have another opportunity to play Magnus and get a result.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# How Good is Your Chess?

## by Grandmaster Daniel King

I have spent the last few months studying the Kalashnikov variation of the Sicilian: 1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5 5 ♘b5 d6 – and writing up my thoughts in the form of a new course for Chessable.

Looking at this position in terms of time, Black has to be fine: the knight on b5 has already moved three times, and will soon have to move again, so that Black in many lines is ahead in development.

I have always felt comfortable with this pawn structure: the Sveshnikov, the Najdorf, the Boleslavsky and the Löwenthal have all been in my repertoire. Far from being a weakness, that backward d-pawn is often the key to success: when it finally comes, the ...d6-d5 pawn break often allows the pieces behind it to explode into the position and gives Black control of the centre because of the 'extra' centre pawn on e5.

For that reason, in my eyes, 6 c4, establishing a Maroczy Bind, is the most ambitious continuation as it attempts to squash Black in the middle of the board. But there are always downsides to advancing pawns: if Black does manage to break through, then the squares behind the pawn are weaker. Perhaps the most serious potential defect of the advance is that it leaves a massive hole on d4. Watch this space!

There have been some great champions of the Kalashnikov – Teimour Radjabov, for example – but in recent years, the exciting Iranian player Parham Maghsoodloo has stepped forward with many new ideas. His game against Anand from the FIDE Online Olympiad last year was a lesson in the dynamic potential of the opening.

**V.Anand-P.Maghsoodloo**
FIDE Online Olympiad (rapid) 2020

**13...b5! 14 cxb5 ♘e7 15 ♗d2 axb5 16 ♗xb5 ♕b6 17 ♘a3 ♖xc3 18 ♗xc3 ♘xe4 19 ♗b2 d5**

What a transformation! Black's pieces and pawns dominate the centre and he won a brilliant game.

I was intrigued to see that Anish Giri used exactly this system in a recent game – he was obviously impressed – and although we will see a somewhat different strategy, there are some similarities with this game.

Begin after the first diagram. Whenever White has moved, stop and try to guess Black's reply which will be on the next line. Try to analyse as much as you would in a game – it could earn you bonus points. The article will test your standard of play or, if you prefer, just enjoy a fine game.

**A.Pichot-A.Giri**
FTX Crypto Cup (rapid) 2021
*Sicilian Kalashnikov*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e5 5 ♘b5 d6 6 c4 g6**

In the early days of the Kalashnikov, Black usually developed the bishop to e7, but this is far more dynamic, particularly in combination with moving the knight to f6.

**7 ♘1c3 a6 8 ♘a3 ♗g7 9 ♘c2 ♘f6 10 ♗e2 0-0 11 ♗e3**

The test starts here.

**11...♗e6**

*Three points*. I can't think of any other sensible move. Black has to develop and, in the Kalashnikov, with the pawn on e5 carving out territory in the middle, this is where the bishop belongs, covering d5. That is the most important square in so many openings, but particularly in the Kalashnikov where d5 cannot be covered by pawns.

**12 0-0**

**12...♖c8**

*Three points*. In most Sicilian positions, that's where the rook belongs, and here it is particularly appropriate, lined up against the pawn on c4 and, behind it, two minor pieces. One never knows when the position might open (OK, with the benefit of hindsight, I do). Remember Anand-Maghsoodloo!

Nothing for 12...♘e8. I see many Kalashnikov players going for a quick ...f5 advance and, frankly, that strategy is just too crude. In the King's Indian Defence, the centre is usually closed, and there it is fitting. Here with the centre open, or rather with White having the potential to open the centre, such a wing attack is reckless.

12...♕d7 (no credit) is too routine. Yes, the rooks are connected, but this isn't a good square for the queen. Tactically it could be hit by a knight landing on b6.

**13 f3** *(see diagram at top of next page)*

Protecting the pawn on e4 and therefore enabling the knight to land on d5. This is a major branching of the ways. Instead of the pawn move, White could also play 13 ♕d2 or 13 b3 – I discuss those alternatives in detail in the course.

**13...♘h5**

*Four points*. This is a big moment in the game. If Black fails to generate counterplay, there is every chance that he will be squashed as White has a space advantage and there is a weak pawn on d6. In a sense, playing the bishop to g7 has raised the stakes: on e7 it at least covers the backward d6-pawn; whereas now Black has to seek complications to offset the weak pawn. The knight move to the edge is made possible because White has played 13 f3, blocking the bishop on e2. The knight may well hop into f4, and the path for the queen is opened towards the kingside.

Instead, 13...♘e7 (*three points*) is a decent move and has been played previously. White has to decide how to deal with the threat to take on c4. If 14 ♘d5 ♘exd5 15 cxd5 ♗d7 16 a4 ♘h5 (Ehmann-Lanka, German Oberliga 2019), when Black is ready to advance the f-pawn to attack the pawn on e4 (here it is OK as the centre has closed). It is perhaps more canny to play 14 b3, and in this case 14...b5 could rebound on Black as it creates weaknesses: 15 ♘d5 ♘exd5 16 cxd5 ♗d7 17 ♘b4 – the knight has found a good square, attacking a6 and looking at the c6 outpost. Instead, 14...♘h5, with the idea of ...♘f4, is a better option.

In this case, playing the knight to the other edge with 13...♘a5 is a mistake. White defends the c-pawn with 14 b3 and in this case 14...b5 isn't working as well as one would wish, since 15 ♘d5 threatens ♗b6, so the knight has to drop back: 15...♘c6 16 ♕d2 bxc4 17 bxc4. At some point Black will have to exchange off the wonderful knight on d5, and then the a6-pawn will be weak. That's a King's Indian Defence gone wrong.

**14 ♘d5**

White carries through his idea. This is rapidplay, and there isn't time to adjust. Besides, it is not a bad move.

**14...♗xd5**

*Three points*. A pragmatic move, and in that sense also typical of rapid play: the knight is dangerous – eliminate it immediately!

14...♘f4 (*three points*) was also a decent choice: 15 ♘xf4 exf4 16 ♗xf4 ♕b6+ 17 ♖f2 ♕xb2 is disruptive – the isolated c4-pawn is always a liability and Black's minor pieces are active. Or 15 ♖e1 ♘xe2+ 16 ♖xe2 f5. In this case, having eliminated the light-squared bishop, the f-pawn advance is appropriate: the e4-pawn is more vulnerable.

**15 ♕xd5**

Before you consider the game continuation, perhaps you'd like to think how you would meet 15 cxd5? Answer on the next line.

15...♘d4 is best. This is the most dynamic way of playing the position, and such a typical pawn sacrifice for the Kalashnikov. White could decline with 16 ♗d3, which is safe, but the acid test is if the pawn is taken: 16 ♘xd4 exd4 17 ♗xd4 ♗xd4+ 18 ♕xd4 ♘f4 19 ♖f2. White is on the defensive.

At this point Black has a choice: advance the h-pawn, 19...h5 20 ♔h1 h4. The position gets highly tactical if White plays g3. Or exchange off and use the c-file: 19...♕g5 20 ♔h1 ♘xe2 21 ♖xe2 ♖c1+ 22 ♖xc1 ♕xc1+ 23 ♕g1 ♖c8. Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn: I don't see how White can easily break free.

Take *four points* if you reached the position after 18...♘f4.

By the way, both 15...♘b8 and 15...♘e7 are possible (*one point* for either of these moves), but Black might well end up in a passive position where the d6-pawn is weak and White's light-squared bishop plays an important role. That is a somewhat pessimistic outlook, but I have seen it happen in these situations where the bishop for knight exchange has taken place.

**15...♘d4**

*Four points*. That move again. This spells trouble for White.

**16 ♗d3**

Before you consider your response to this, let's look at what happens after 16 ♘xd4 exd4. If 17 ♗xd4 ♘f4 wins, therefore White has to retreat: 17 ♗d2. What's the best continuation for Black? Answer on the next line.

17...♖c5 (first the queen is driven away) 18 ♕xb7 d3! (now the diagonal for the bishop is opened) 19 ♗xd3 ♗d4+ 20 ♔h1 ♘g3+ 21 hxg3 ♖h5 mate. Boom! Not all forced, but you get the idea. This checkmate reminds me of similar scenarios in the Benoni, although usually it is the queen doing the checkmating, not a rook.

Naturally 20 ♖f2 is necessary, but Black should have a winning attack: 20...♕h4 21 ♖af1 (21 g3 ♘xg3!) 21...♘g3!. If that is taken, then the rook swings across to h5 and mate follows. Check this continuation, it's really beautiful: 22 ♗c3 ♖h5 23 h3 ♗e3 (the bishop is kept so that White is unable to free himself) 24 ♗e1 ♕f4 25 a4 ♘e2+ 26 ♗xe2 ♕g3 (threatening ...♖xh3) 27 ♕d7 ♗f4 and mate follows shortly on h2. What a traffic jam of pieces – White's king simply cannot escape. I am not expecting you to have seen all this, but take *four points* if you found up to 19...♗d4+.

**16...b5**

*Four points*. The classic pawn break against the Maroczy Bind (see the introductory text), and there are some unusual tactical motifs in play as well. The first thing to note is that the pawn cannot be taken because the knight on c2 hangs (12...♖c8 comes good); added to that, the options for White's queen are closing down.

16...♘f4 (*two points*) is testing: 17 ♗xf4 exf4 (White's queen is still in danger) 18 ♘xd4 ♕b6 (threatening ...♖c5) 19 e5 (makes room for the queen) 19...dxe5 20 ♗e4 (and the bishop) 20...♖fd8 21 ♕xb7 ♕xd4+ 22 ♔h1 ♖xc4 23 ♕xa6. Black is more active and has the potential to roll the kingside pawn majority. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go. Or 18 ♕xb7 ♖b8 19 ♕d5 ♕b6 20 ♘xd4 ♕xd4+ 21 ♔h1 ♖xb2, and Black also has some advantage here.

Nothing for 16...♕d7. It threatens ...♖c5, but allows the queen to escape: 17 ♕a5!.

**17 ♘xd4**

How would you respond to 17 b3? Answer on the next line.

The best move is 17...♕d7, taking away the b7-square from the queen and threatening

both ...♖c5 and ...♘f6 (*two bonus points*).

**17...exd4**

*One point.*

**18 ♗g5**

Instead, if 18 ♗xd4 ♘f4 wins a piece; likewise, 18 ♗f2 ♘f4. That knight is proving to be a very useful player.

**18...♕b6**

*Four points.* Covering the b7-square. The net closes in around the white queen.

18...♕d7 (*two points*) is also strong. White has to scramble just to survive: 19 e5 (to give the queen an escape square; tactics now follow) 19...♖c5 20 ♕xd4 ♗xe5 21 ♕h4 (the queen has to maintain protection of the c4-pawn) 21...bxc4 22 ♗xc4 ♗f4 (forcing a favourable trade) 23 ♗xf4 ♖xc4 24 g3 (the bishop has to be protected) 24...♘xf4 25 gxf4 ♕f5. With active pieces, the better pawn structure and White's king exposed, Black has a serious positional advantage. That line was more or less forced, but it would take accurate calculation to get here.

**19 cxb5**

19 e5 was a better chance, but still fairly miserable: 19...bxc4 20 ♗xc4 ♗xe5 21 ♗d3 ♗f4 22 ♗xf4 ♘xf4 23 ♕e4 ♘xd3 24 ♕xd3 ♕xb2 with a big advantage for Black.

**19...♖c5**

*Two points.* That is effectively that. After just 19 moves Black has achieved a winning position. Of course, one still has to win it.

**20 ♕b3**

**20...♖xg5**

*One point.* The queen has escaped, but at the price of that all-important dark-squared bishop.

**21 bxa6**

Ah, a far-advanced pawn on a6. A problem?

**21...♕xb3**

*Three points.* Not at all. A little calculation is enough to see that everything is under control.

**22 axb3**

**22...♘f4**

*Three points.* That is the key move, ensuring a breakthrough to the enemy king. White cannot hold both g2 and the bishop on d3. Once again, the knight plays a starring role.

**23 ♗c4**

**23...♖xg2+**

*One point.*

**24 ♔h1**

**24...♖xb2**

*Three points.* The rook could move to d2 or c2, but why not take on b2? That sets up more tactics. The important point is that Black controls the seventh rank and has the option to attack the king.

**25 ♖fb1**

If 25 a7 ♖a8 halts the pawn. Check this variation: 26 ♗b5 (threatening ♗c6) 26...♗e5 (setting up an attack on the king and also providing Black's king with an escape square on g7) 27 ♗c6 ♘h3 (threatening mate in one) 28 f4 (a desperate but necessary defence) 28...♖xa7 (the rook can go) 29 ♖xa7 ♗xf4 (White has to give the rook to avoid mate) 30 ♖xf4 ♘xf4 and the d-pawn decides. Black's domination of the second rank, and the monstrous knight, are too strong.

**25...♖c2**

*One point.* Giri plays it tough, maintaining the rook on the seventh. One could also exchange and play ...d3.

**26 ♖c1**

**26...d3**

*One point.* That's why the rook went to c2.

**27 ♖xc2**

**27...♗xa1**

*One point.* The most accurate.

27...dxc2?! 28 ♖c1 would still require a bit of work.

**28 ♖c1**

Instead, 28 ♖d2 ♗c3 29 ♖d1 d2 keeps the d-pawn and ensures an easy path to victory.

**28...♗d4**

*One point.*

**29 ♖d1**

**29...♗c5**

*One point.* Minor pieces need solid protection.

**30 h4**

Creating a little room for the king.

If 30 ♗xd3 ♘xd3 31 ♖xd3 ♖a8 picks up the a-pawn and makes the win easy.

**30...♔g7**

*Two points.* There are lots of ways to win, but this is convincing and thematic.

**31 ♔h2**

**31...♔f6**

*One point.*

**32 ♔g3**

**32...♔e5 0-1**

*One point.* Beautiful centralisation. The king ensures that the knight remains on its beautiful position. Black's next move could be ...g5 to break open the g-file when White's king will be powerless against the attack of rook, bishop and knight. Pichot decided that he had seen enough and resigned.

**Now add up your points**:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-14 | Unlucky |
| 15-29 | Average Club Player |
| 30-37 | Strong Club Player |
| 38-43 | FIDE Master |
| 44-50 | International Master |
| 51-58 | Grandmaster |

*Ed. – If you have any questions regarding this article, please contact Daniel directly through his website www.danielking.biz.*

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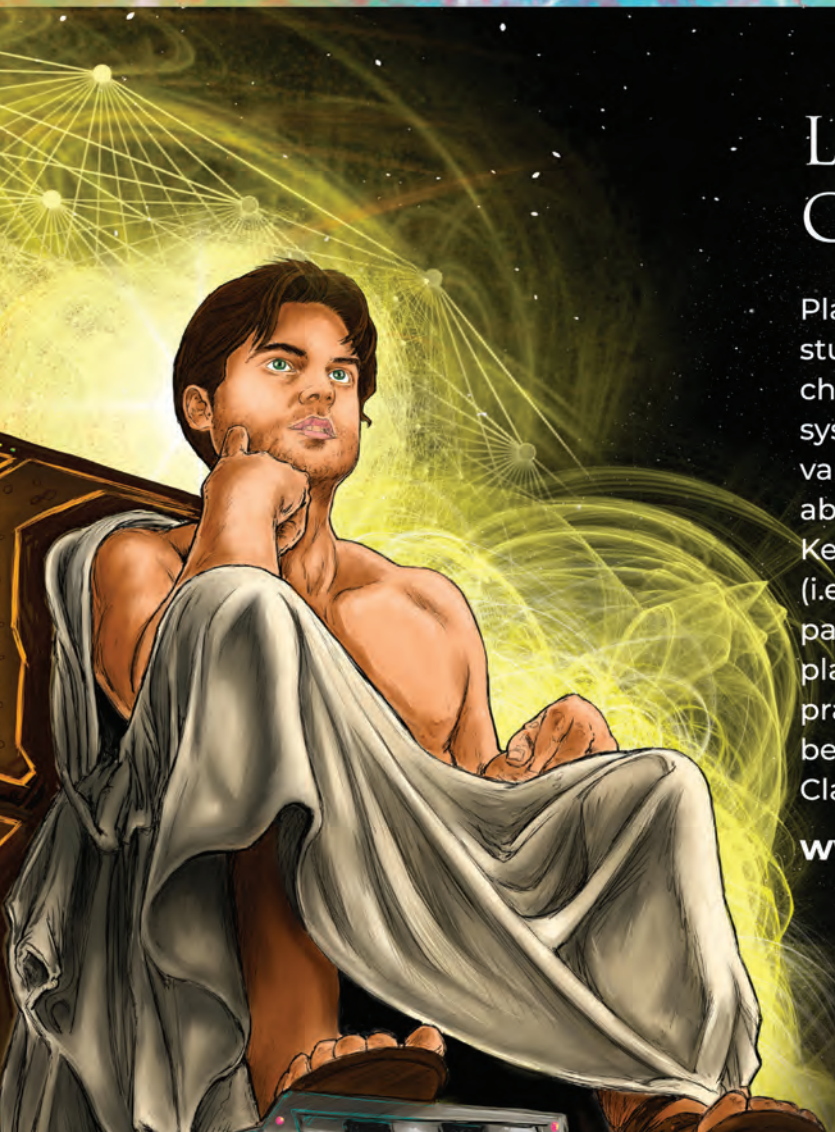

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# A Room with a View

## Celebrating the sport of queens, knights and pawns in the horse capital of the world, by Steve Barrett

Beth Harmon's character in *The Queen's Gambit* has propelled chess into a realm of popularity not seen since the Fischer-Spassky Match of the Century in 1972. Portrayed expertly and memorably by American-born, Argentine-British actress Anya Taylor-Joy, the story revolves around an orphaned chess prodigy who struggles with pill addiction in her quest to become the greatest chess player in the world.

Its compelling narrative resonated with chess fans and non-chess fans alike in a way most dramas based on the royal game fail to do, helped by the stylish fashion and beautifully recreated 60s details and locations.

The chess scenes were as realistic as any portrayed before on the big or small screen, in thanks due to expert consultants including Garry Kasparov and Bruce Pandolfini. There were no black squares in the right-hand corner or queens on the king's square in this dramatisation.

Based on a 1983 Walter Tevis novel, the series set the record as the most-watched scripted limited series to date on Netflix, with 62-million member accounts tuning in to the showin the 28 days after it launched on October 23rd last year.

Tevis, who also wrote *The Hustler*, *The Color of Money* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, sadly died in 1984 and is buried in Richmond, Kentucky, where he lived as a teenager. This happens to be my wife's hometown.

We got married in Kentucky just over two years ago and stayed at the 21c Museum Hotel in the city of Lexington, where much of the action in *The Queen's Gambit* takes place. So, when we discovered local tourism body VisitLEX had teamed up with 21c to create The Harmon Room inspired by the show, we knew we had to stay there for our second wedding anniversary.

The room is a meticulously designed time capsule of American mid-century modern design, replete with vintage 60s accessories, nods to the show's most memorable moments and characters, and period furniture.

Custom wallpaper dubbed The Knight's Gambit was designed for the project and there were copies of *Chess Review* magazine and rare chess books on display in the room. A limited-edition walnut-and-maple chess board was created and one is situated in the room should guests fancy a game during their stay, with pieces and a period appropriate analogue chess clock of course.

Most striking of all was the centerpiece artistic recreation of Beth's drug-induced hallucinations – a chessboard installation suspended from the ceiling in tribute to her big showdown game with Russian Grandmaster and World Champion Vasily Borgov. Given Beth and her mother's fondness for a cocktail, and that Lexington is right in the heart of bourbon country, there is also a well-stocked bar in the room should you wish to fix yourself a nightcap.

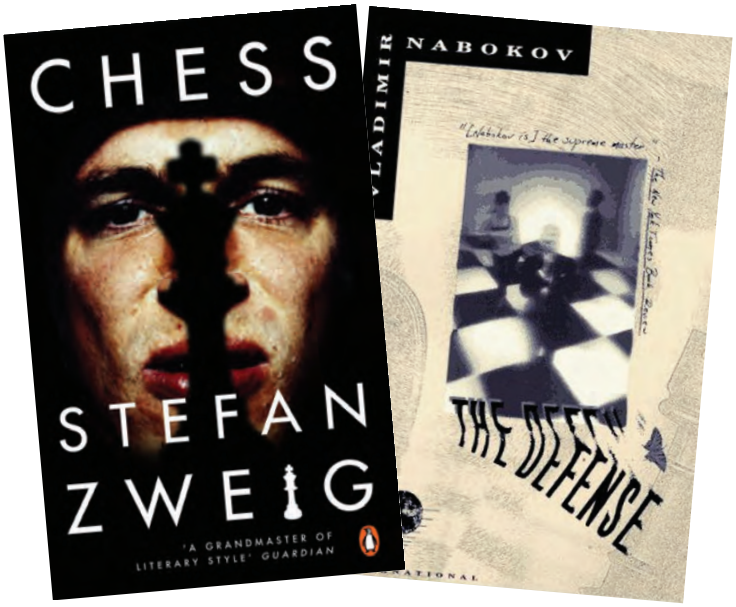
The Harmon Room opened in the first week of January to a rousing reception and much media attention. It was featured on the cover of local magazine *The Voice*, with a fashion shoot taking place in the room. The hotel says it "will continue to be available as long as there is interest" and until at least the end of the year.

# After The Queen's Gambit...

## Ben Graff explores two earlier classics – *The Defense* and *Chess*

*"He played four hours without pause and won, but when he was already sitting in the taxi he forgot on the way where it was he was going, what postcard address he had given the driver to read and waited with interest to see where the car would stop."*

*The Defense* – Vladimir Nabokov




As chess players we all know that our game can shape many a terrific story. Perhaps there is something about a pursuit that is both logical and yet unfathomable that truly captures the imagination. While we compete against others, every chess player understands that the real battle is against themselves. Sometimes we probably feel entirely at home on the sixty-four squares. Other times, as alone and exposed as if we were stranded on the highest mountain ridge. Chess lends itself to triumph and disaster. Genius and obsession. It is it any wonder it has inspired some great fiction?

Like many readers, I very much enjoyed *The Queen's Gambit*. Beth Harmon survives a difficult childhood and battles with addiction as she grows in strength as a chess player, culminating in her victory over the world champion. Without question, her life turns out much better than it might otherwise have done, had her school not been blessed with a chess-playing caretaker. For those looking for other great stories, this month I wanted to look at two older chess classics. Novels with similarly strong characters, albeit the judgement as to whether chess helps or ultimately destroys these protagonists is less positive than in *The Queen's Gambit*.

*The Defense* by Vladimir Nabokov (sometimes known as *The Luzhin Defense*), and *Chess* by Stefan Zweig, published respectively in 1930 and 1941, differ in terms of style and approach, but are essentially rooted in the same theme. Namely that of chess and obsession. In one, a world title contender loses his grip after a lifetime's exposure to the game. In the other, a much shorter but incredibly intense chess experience will prove to be similarly catastrophic. Both feature players who are blessed with incredible gifts, that undoubtedly come at a considerable price.

When I was younger, I would sometimes go on writing retreats, at which distinguished English novelists would be wheeled out as guest speakers. Invariably they would be asked who their own favourite writer was, and almost always (in tones ranging from unbridled admiration through to raging jealously) they would say that it was Nabokov.

Nabokov was a man whose talents extended past literature; he was also an avid composer of chess problems. He once said: "Chess problems demand from the composer the same virtues that characterise all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity, and splendid insincerity." Like many a good chess player, Nabokov never learnt to drive, and he was both a synesthete – someone who saw letters as colours – and a terrible insomniac who viewed the night as a "giant". Nabokov was also a lepidopterist who identified over twenty new species of butterflies, many of which were named after characters in his novels.

Based loosely on Curt von Bardeleben, a man who achieved fame by walking out of the tournament hall rather than resign against Steinitz (at least in some tellings), and then later by jumping out of a window, Nabokov's Luzhin is certainly challenged. An apathetic and inconsequential child, he discovers a talent for chess that will take him a long way.

One of the five or six best players in the world, Luzhin has nevertheless found "in recent years he had been having no luck at international tournaments; a ghostly barrier had arisen that kept preventing him from coming first." Even finding in Manchester that "the decrepit champion of England forced a draw after a two-day struggle." His game is starting to look "just a little old fashioned."

More worryingly still, Luzhin appears increasingly to be struggling to distinguish every-day life from a chess board. At one point thinking that: "The urns that stood on stone pedestals at the four corners of the terrace threatened one another across their diagonals." Then at another: "He sat [...] thinking that with a Knight's move of this lime tree standing on a sunlit slope one could take that telegraph pole over there..."

Even Luzhin's (perhaps somewhat unlikely) admirer sees the challenges inherent in such a beau. "And in the middle of this bleak disorder sat the most unfathomable of men, a man who occupied himself with this spectral art, and she tried to stop, to grasp at all his failings and peculiarities, to tell herself once and for all that this man was not the right one for her – and at the same time she was quite distinctly worried about how he would behave in church and how he would look in tails."

Yet for all this, in the tournament to determine who will take on the world champion, Luzhin hits the form of his life, as does his main rival Turati. "He moved in step with Turati. Turati scored a point and he scored a point; Turati scored a half and he scored a half. Thus they proceeded with their separate games, as if mounting the sides of an isosceles triangle and destined at the decisive moment to meet at the apex."

The famous late American novelist John Updike has highlighted that Turati's name sounds a little like Reti, and Turati shares Reti's liking for flank openings. Similarly, Updike notes that there are parallels between Reti and Luzhin, in that both were destined to die prematurely, having married partners much younger than themselves.

John Updike writes: "So, in the hall of mirrors which is chess thought, Luzhin is playing a reflection of himself; small wonder he thinks his way into a nervous breakdown during the tournament, while keen suspense mounts as to whether 'the limpidity and lightness of Luzhin's thought would prevail over the Italian's tumultuous fantasy.'"

Sadly, Luzhin does indeed finally crack, disconcerted that his opening preparation has been rendered irrelevant in his game with Turati. "Suddenly, something occurred outside his being, a scorching pain – and he let out a loud cry, shaking his hand stung by the flame of a match, which he had lit and forgotten to apply to his cigarette. The pain immediately passed, but in the fiery gap he had seen something unbearably awesome, the full horror of the abysmal depths of chess."

The game itself might well still have been in the balance, even if that is not how it was reported: "And the newspapers printed an announcement that Luzhin had had a nervous breakdown before finishing the deciding game and that, according to Turati, black was bound to lose because of the weakness of the pawn on f4." (As we will see later, in Zweig's *Chess,* the victor also gets to render the ultimate verdict on a game, even though this is less than the full story.)

*Vladimir Nabokov never learnt to drive and was a great eccentric, as well as a great writer.*

It is deemed that the only way for Luzhin to regain his health is to give up chess. Yet can a player like Luzhin really be expected to make such a choice? Chess proves to be impossible to avoid, whether it is an implausible game he sees at a movie, or the chess articles he comes across in the newspaper (which sometimes feature his own games). Ultimately, Luzhin determines that he will "have to drop out of the game", and while there is a hint of ambiguity, it does appear that Luzhin ultimately suffers the same fate as Curt von Bardeleben.

Stefan Zweig's *Chess* (sometimes titled *Chess: A novel* or *The Royal Game)* gives a somewhat different take on chess and obsession. A brilliant Jewish writer, Zweig fled the Nazis in the 1930s, and his short novel was in part a reaction to his own experiences of the Nazi regime.

Unlike Nabokov, Zweig was not much of a chess player himself. One of his friends, Ernst Feder, described Zweig's chess ability thus: "In itself it was no pleasure to be his opponent on the black-and-white board. I am a poor player myself, but he knew so little about chess that I had difficulty in wangling an occasional win for him."

Yet, Zweig was certainly a first-rate storyteller. He gives us world champion Mirko Czentovic, a man who alas has not been similarly endowed with equivalent gifts away from the chess board: "Soon the secret was leaking out that, in private life, this grandmaster of chess couldn't write a sentence in any language without making spelling mistakes, and as one of his piqued colleagues remarked with irate derision, 'his ignorance was universal in all fields.'"

Mirko Czentovic is travelling by boat from New York to Buenos Aires. Perhaps it is not surprising that a group of fellow passengers are keen to challenge him to a game. It is however a little unfortunate for Czentovic that a certain voyager, not initially involved in the contest, happens to have had an extraordinary chess experience which could well make him a formidable opponent.

Dr B. had been held in solitary confinement over an extended period by the Nazis. Almost driven to despair, his salvation comes when he manages to steal a book from a coat pocket while waiting to be interrogated. At first Dr B. was disappointed to find that he had stolen a chess book, but is soon hooked. In captivity he memorised and replayed all the games, then when they finally contained nothing new for him, he started playing games against himself in his head.

"What began as mere occupation to fill the time became enjoyment, and the figures of the great strategists of chess such as Alekhine, Lasker, Bogolyubov and Tartakower entered my solitary confinement as beloved comrades." Yet unfortunately over time, Dr B. finds that: "My delight in playing turned to a lust for playing, my lust for playing into a compulsion to play, a mania, a frenetic fury that filled not only my waking hours, but also came to invade my sleep."

Bizarrely, perhaps some good initially comes from this. While it drives Dr B. completely mad, "At midday the doctor came [...] was I a mathematician or a chemist? I said no. 'Strange,' he murmured. 'In your delirium you kept crying out such strange formulae – c3, c4. We could none of us make anything of them'." This results in him being released from jail, but who can tell what effect chess might have on Dr B. should he ever play again?

Yet having first brilliantly assisted his fellow passengers in securing a draw against Czentovic (someone he has not heard of and is shocked to discover is the world champion), Dr B. is encouraged to take on Czentovic the following day, despite his reservations. As Dr B.

*Stefan Zweig was a poor chess player, but able to brilliantly capture addiction to the game.*

highlights: "It will be only a kind of test for me [...] a test to see if [...] if I'm even capable of playing a normal game of chess [...] for I doubt more and more whether those hundreds, perhaps thousands of games I played were genuine games and not just a kind of dream chess, delirious chess, a game played in a fever, missing out certain stages as you do in a dream."

Amazingly Dr B. manages to beat Czentovic, who does not take defeat particularly well. "He slowly but with a determined gesture pushed all the pieces off the board with the back of his hand [...] He had capitulated so as to avoid being visibly checkmated in front of us." I have seen a leading GM concede a simul game in similar fashion and it is easy to imagine Czentovic's annoyance at losing to a complete unknown.

Despite having pledged to only play one game, Dr B. agrees to another, "and his body trembled as if shaken by a sudden fever [...] Suddenly there was something new between the two players: a dangerous tension, a passionate hatred." Yet the tables are starting to turn. Czentovic realises that playing slowly places a huge strain on Dr B. and the pressure begins to tell.

Ultimately Dr B. loses his grip on reality, the pieces are no longer where he thinks they should be, he sees a check that is not there and resigns, resolving that he will never play again. Czentovic has the last word, remarking "magnanimously" that "It wasn't a bad attack at all. For an amateur, that gentleman really is uncommonly gifted."

Two chess players who ultimately realise they cannot live with chess, and one in Luzhin who sadly decides that it is not possible to live without it. Both novels are moving and in places very funny. The chess feels real, the struggles of the characters become our struggles. Perhaps *The Defense* proves the adage that chess rather than driving sane people mad, can help to keep people comparatively sane, in that Luzhin fares

better when he is playing than after he quits. When it comes to Dr B., is it not a delightful (yet terrifying) thought that being locked in a room with a chess book and nothing else for long enough could turn someone into a player capable of beating the world champion?

These really are stories about chess on the edge. Even for the most brilliant, chess will not give up all her secrets. An unconquerable game alloyed with obsession can be a dangerous mix as these novels show. Perhaps it could be argued that even with writing of this undoubted quality, there is still something of a caricature inherent in stories that link chess with madness. This might well be so, and these books were crafted in quite different eras to our own. Yet highly eccentric players have shared the board with altogether more rationale and well rounded characters since the beginning of time. Nabokov and Zweig simply push this notion to its logical, if sobering, extreme.

Yet what would Luzhin have been without chess? The pleasure and sense of purpose it has given him, the strength of his accomplishments (even if he did not become world champion) still count for something. Similarly, Dr B. might at first have regretted that the book he chanced upon in captivity was a chess book, but it is difficult to imagine any other volume occupying his mind so intensely. What else could have consumed his time so fully, or initially given so much joy? Besides, without chess he might never have escaped from captivity in the first place.

Of course the price Luzhin and Dr B. pay for their gifts is undoubtedly too high. The bright future Beth Harmon appears to have in her sights at the end of *The Queen's* Gambit, is not to be their lot. Chess brilliance, like most other things, means little without a sense of perspective and balance. I doubt any of us would want to be Luzhin or Dr B. Yet there is something to be said for making their acquaintance, before finally closing these wonderful books, safe in the knowledge that we have that bit more confidence as to where our own taxis are going to take us.

# Studies with Stephenson

My previous column covered the online tourney arranged in place of the final of the 2020-2021 Winton British Chess Solving Championship which couldn't take place due to Covid restrictions. This year's event starts here with the starter problem, which is the first diagram below. White, playing up the board, is to play and force mate in two moves against any black defence. There is no entry fee, and the competition is open to British residents only.

Competitors need only send White's first move, known as the key move. Entries can be made in one of two ways:

By post to: Nigel Dennis, Boundary House, 230 Greys Rd, Henley-on-Thames, RG9 1QY.

By email to: winton@theproblemist.org.

All entries must be postmarked or emailed no later than 31st July 2021 and must give the entrant's name and home address. Juniors under the age of 18 on 31st August 2020 must give their date of birth.

Please mention that you saw the starter problem here in *CHESS*. Receipt of the solution to the starter will only be acknowledged after the closing date, when all competitors will receive the answer, and those who get it right will also receive the postal round, which will contain eight more difficult and varied problems. In due course the best competitors and the best juniors from the postal round will be invited to the final in February 2022. The exact date and location will be advised. The ultimate winner of the final will win the right to represent Great Britain at the World Chess Solving Championships 2022.

### WBCSC Starter, 2021-2022

*White to play and mate in 2*

Once you have your solving head on, do have a go at this endgame study by successful Ukrainian composer Vladislav Tarasiuk. It was commended in a tourney held to celebrate the 80th birthday of his countryman Filip Bondarenko.

### Vladislav Tarasiuk
Commend, Bondarenko Jubilee Ty., 1985

*White to play and win*

To enter email editor@chess.co.uk or send your name and address, with the main variations, to Chess & Bridge, 44 Baker St, London W1U 7RT, postmarked no later than 31st July. A £30 gift voucher from Chess & Bridge is available for the first correct entry drawn.

The winner of our May competition was Thomas Luby from Richmond. The solution:

### G. Popov
2nd Prize, *Suomen Shakki*, 1957

*White to play and mate in 3*

**1 ♘e8!**

White adds a guard on d6 and threatens **2 ♕e5+ ♘xe5 3 ♘f4#**. Black has three defences:

**1...e3** and the blocking of e3 allows **2 ♕e4+ ♔xe4 3 ♘f6#**;

**1...♔e6** allows **2 ♕xf5+ ♔xf5 3 ♘g7#**;

**1...♗xd6** leads to **2 ♕xd6+ ♘xd6 3 ♘c7#**.

A pleasant, traditional three-mover featuring four queen sacrifices.

**If you enjoy chess problems and endgame studies, why not join the *British Chess Problem Society*? A £5 a year subscription secures you PDFs of two magazines six times a year. Apply by email to Assistant-Treasurer@theproblemist.org**

# ‘Tal on Acid’

## Albin Planinc produced many inspiring games, as FM Julian M Way reveals

Extremely dynamic play is worth looking at because it challenges the tendency to prioritise material considerations. Albin Planinc (1944-2008) was a player who had a nuanced understanding of dynamic possibilities in chess and even earned the accolade ‘Tal on Acid’.

Planinc saw the importance of retaining the initiative and always trying to put the opponent on the back foot. His choice of moves was uncompromising and showed enormous bravery and commitment. He rarely settled for draws, always seeking to create something from the position. Moreover many of his more emphatic wins came as Black, for instance against Ljubojevic (Vrsac 1971) and Minic (Zagreb 1975).

Albin Planinc was born in Brise in Yugoslavia in 1944 and rose to prominence in 1965 when he defeated Matulovic in a game, in which Planinc sacrificed a rook for a dangerous initiative and eventually won with an elegant combination. This game achieved world-wide publicity.

Planinc’s chess career had three notable highlights: the Vidmar Memorial in Ljubljana in 1969, the strong IBM tournament in Amsterdam in 1973 and Hastings 1974/75. At the Vidmar Memorial he finished ahead of a strong field, despite working at a bike factory during the day. Planinc gained a grandmaster result, but was not awarded the grandmaster title as he needed to become an international master first.

He eventually became a grandmaster in 1972. A few years later Planinc won the strong IBM tournament in 1973 in Amsterdam (along with Petrosian), finishing ahead of Boris Spassky. Spassky said that he was quite happy to draw with Planinc such was the incredible energy Planinc was putting into his games. At Hastings 1974/75 Planinc played his most famous game, when he defeated Vaganian, finishing the game with a subtle knight manoeuvre and a delicate queen sacrifice.

It is fantastic news that Slovenian GM Georg Mohr is bringing out a new book about Planinc (co-authored by GM Adrian Mikhalchishin), with a lot of biographical material and 400 games. The book will be published by Thinkers Publishing.

It is clear that Planinc suffered with serious mental illness throughout his life, perhaps being over-dependent on his mother and consistently struggling to achieve meaningful social connection. Mohr had the amazing opportunity to study chess with Planinc, and Planinc clearly inspired Mohr to become a strong chess player. He notes that Planinc left school without any qualifications and dedicated himself to chess.

*Slovenian Grandmaster Albin Planinc (1944-2008) was an attacker of no mean repute.*

Between 1965 and 1979 Planinc was active on the chess scene, producing many outrageous chess brilliancies. However, because of mental illness Planinc retired from competitive chess in 1979 and for a number of years worked as a chess coach. Furthermore, his mental health deteriorated further and it is a great tragedy that he spent the last 20 years of his life in a nursing home and hospital in Ljubljana, having minimal contact with the outside world and the chess community. He died in 2008 at the age of 64, a few months after his mother passed away.

It is wonderful that Mohr’s book will bring Planinc’s life and games to public attention. There is also a new course on Chessable by Scottish international, Jim Stevenson, entitled ‘Slovenian Supernova’ which offers a great opportunity to engage with Tal on Acid.

Below are two games from Planinc, one an all-out assault against Matulovic’s Sicilian Taimanov and the other a cruel humiliation of Donner in a brutal Modern Benoni. You might want to fasten your seat belts.

**A.Planinc-M.Matulovic**
Novi Sad 1965
*Sicilian Taimanov*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 d4 cxd4 4 ♘xd4 e6 5 ♘c3 ♕c7 6 f4 a6 7 ♗e3 ♗b4**

Black attempts to gain activity with this move. However the drawback of putting his bishop on b4 rather than e7 is that he will have to defend against a possible kingside attack without this key piece.

**8 ♕g4**

This move is analogous to ♕g4 in the French Winawer. White attempts to seize the initiative by targeting the weakened g7-square.

**8...g6**

This is a concession, but Black resists the idea of ...♔f8 forfeiting the right to castle. His move creates a potential weakness on his dark squares. Now Planinc will have something to bite on should he choose to attack on that flank.

**9 ♕h4**

This is an interesting and creative move, denying Black the natural developing move ...♘f6. Sometimes good chess involves disrupting your opponent's options and aspirations.

**9...♗e7**

In order to force through ...♘f6 Black needs to make this unnatural move.

**10 ♕f2 ♘f6 11 ♗e2 ♗b4**

Yet another move by this piece, but Black wants to reassert indirect pressure on e4.

**12 ♗f3 d6**

Black locks his dark-squared bishop outside the pawn chain, which means the bishop can longer assist with the defence of the king.

**13 0-0 0-0 14 ♕h4**

White returns his queen to h4 where it takes up a menacing position and signals Planinc's kingside intentions.

**14...♘e8**

It is amazing how Planinc induces passivity in his opponents, but this retreat is necessary. It is significant that the majority of the black army is still on the first rank and it is fair to say that Matulovic has failed to get his pieces into the game.

**15 f5**

Planinc puts his foot on the accelerator and attempts to break open the black position.

**15...♗c5**

Clearly Black cannot take on f5 with his e-pawn. It would be fatal to cede the d5-square.

**16 ♖ad1**

Planinc brings his last piece into play. It is always tempting to neglect the rook on a1.

**16...♘xd4 17 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 18 ♖xd4 ♕c5**

Black needs this pin to create meaningful counterplay. With hindsight Planinc might have played an earlier ♔h1 which often happens in the Scheveningen.

**19 ♖d1!?**

Planinc decides to sacrifice his rook on d4. He could have broken the pin with 19 ♕f2, but is reluctant to suspend his attack and instead proceeds with this outrageous and uncompromising choice.

**19...e5**

Black accepts the sacrifice, but cedes the d5-square.

**20 ♘d5 ♔g7 21 b4!**

A superb move which pushes the black queen to the edge of the board where she will struggle to contribute.

**21...♕a7 22 f6 ♔h8 23 ♕h6**

The white queen places herself on h6, one of the vulnerable squares yielded by Black's earlier move 8...g6. She nestles ominously close to the king's hearth.

**23...♖g8**

Necessary as White was threatening ♘c7 which would deflect the knight on e8 from its defence of g7.

**24 ♖d3**

Planinc now reorganises his pieces in a fashion which is analogous to rearranging furniture in one's living room. In Planinc's capable hands it appears to be quite a slick operation. He intends ♖h3, but needs to preface this move with ♗d1 and g2-g4.

**24...exd4**

Matulovic finally avails himself of his prey.

**25 ♗d1 g5**

Black desperately wants to oust the queen from h6, so he prepares ...♖g6. He doesn't want White to line up his queen and rook on the h-file.

**26 g4**

This blocks the bishop at c8 from controlling the important h3-square.

**26...♖g6 27 ♕f8**

The evicted queen finds another point of access.

**27...♖g8 28 ♕xf7 b5**

Matulovic defends his second rank laterally finally releasing his own queen from captivity, but to no avail.

**29 ♘e7 ♗e6**

This allows a neat finish.

**30 ♕xh7! ♔xh7 31 ♖h3# 1-0**

It is fitting that the move Planinc has been preparing for so long actually delivers mate.

**J.H.Donner-A.Planinc**
Wijk aan Zee 1973
*Modern Benoni*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5**

Planinc chooses the Modern Benoni, a provocative counterattacking opening which is very much in keeping with his style.

**3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 ♘d2**

Donner opts for the Knight's Tour variation; far more challenging is the Flick Knife where White plays 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♗b5+. The Knight's Tour involves a rerouting of the f3-knight to c4, where it will exert pressure on the d6-pawn.

**7...g6 8 ♘c4 ♗g7 9 ♗f4**

White has spent considerable time co-ordinating his pieces to target d6. However, even at this stage of the game Planinc decides that the dynamic importance of activity is more important than material.

**9...b6**

Necessary to preserve c5 and with the added dividend of giving the bishop access to a6.

**10 ♗xd6 ♖e8**

White has forced Black to move his rook to a superior square where it controls the important e-file. At this stage Donner should have been worried about his uncastled king.

**11 ♗g3 ♘e4**

We are encouraged as beginners not to move the same piece twice, but Planinc is keen to put his opponent on the back foot and dictate the pace of the game.

**12 ♘xe4 ♖xe4**

The rook takes up a prominent position in the centre of the board.

**13 e3 b5!**

Expanding on the queenside and again putting the question to White.

**14 ♘d6**

The knight moves to an advanced position, but it is somewhat precarious.

**14...♖b4**

This lateral and unconventional rook move is consistent with Planinc's game plan of keeping up the pressure.

**15 ♗xb5**

Donner decides to grab material, perhaps arguing that if material becomes level he has lost the opening battle due to Black's considerable activity.

**15...♗f8!!**

A superb move, which is very counter-intuitive, taking the bishop off the menacing long diagonal. Planinc's premise is to keep asking Donner questions. The knight on d6 is now loose, but it is also defending the bishop on b5. Is there a way out of this for Donner?

**16 ♗c6!**

Donner finds this ingenious resource. If Black plays 16...♘xc6, after 17 dxc6 White's queen on d1 will then be supporting the knight on d6.

**16...♗a6!!**

*Planinc was unable to repeat his success from the previous year at the1974 IBM tournament in Amsterdam, where he finished on 7/15, some three points behind Taimanov, Ivkov and Jansa.*

Planinc decides that preventing Donner from castling is more important than preserving his rook on a8 – a brave and uncompromising decision.

**17 ♗xa8 ♖xb2!**

Keeping up the pressure and threatening a nasty check on e2.

**18 ♕a4**

Providing a flight square for the king on d1.

**18...♕f6**

The queen places herself on the wonderful long diagonal and threatens 19...♕c3, as well as 19...♖e2 followed by 20...♕xa1.

**19 ♖c1**

Donner is hanging on for dear life.

**19...♗xd6**

The perfect time to take on d6; Black threatens to take on g3 and follow that up with ...♕xf2 with terrible consequences.

**20 f4 ♕f5!**

Planinc switches to the light squares – note that White's light-squared bishop is languishing on a8, rather like an injured player receiving treatment from the physio on the touchline.

**21 e4**

White must prevent ...♕d3 which would be terminal.

**21...♖e2 22 ♔d1 ♕h5! 0-1**

The bishop on a6 and the queen on h5 create a kind of pincer effect. Black threatens unpleasant discovered checks, so Donner calls it a day. Quite an emphatic victory by Planinc.

# 60 Seconds with...
# Matthew Webb

**Born:** Bradford, 11th October 1986.

**Place of residence:** London.

**Occupation:** Software Architect.

**Enjoyable?** Love it. Constant problem solving under pressure.

**And home life?** Chaotic. Always moving around, never in one place.

**But sometimes good to escape to:** Las Vegas to play poker.

**Sports played or followed**: 5-a-side and rowing. I rarely watch sport.

**A favourite novel?** *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas.

**Piece of music?** Ludovico Einaudi's 'Primavera'.

**Film or TV series?** *A Few Good Men* and *Suits*.

**What's the best thing about playing chess?** No one style beats all; creativity can be found in the simplest of positions.

**And the worst?** Players ruling something as 'dead drawn' without playing it out. Infuriating.

**Your best move?** 18 ♘h7! against FM David Walker to put me in back in contention for winning the Blackpool Open in 2015.

**M.Webb-D.Walker**
Blackpool 2015

**18 ♘h7! ♕b7 19 ♗xh6! ♘e4 20 ♗xe4 dxe4 21 ♘f6+! ♗xf6 22 exf6 b4 23 c4 ♗xc4 24 ♗xg7 ♕b5 25 ♕h6 1-0**

**But less memorable than your worst move?** Blundering my extra pawn to a discovered check cost me the half-point I needed to get to the Terafinal as an unknown newbie 13-year-old.

**And a highly memorable opponent?** Russian GM Evgeniy Najer, who was kind enough to analyse our game afterwards at the European Club Cup in Bilbao; this magnified just how little I knew about chess and how incredibly hard-working these top GMs are.

**Favourite game of all time?** Polugaevsky-Nezhmetdinov, USSR 1958.

**L.Polugaevsky-R.Nezhmetdinov**
Sochi 1958

**24...♖xf4!! 25 ♖xh2 ♖f3+ 26 ♔d4 ♗g7 27 a4 c5+ 28 dxc6 bxc6 29 ♗d3 ♘exd3+ 30 ♔c4 d5+ 31 exd5 cxd5+ 32 ♔b5 ♖b8+ 33 ♔a5 ♘c6+ 0-1**

**The best three chess books**: *My 60 Memorable Games* by Bobby Fischer, Igor Stohl's *Instructive Modern Chess Masterpieces* and *Winning Chess Middlegames* by Ivan Sokolov.

**Is FIDE doing a good job?** Hmm. Not enough presence within the UK, especially for top FIDE events or large international opens, those which lure the best GMs from far and wide.

**Or your National Federation?** They need to do more to elevate the profiles of our star players, bringing with it sponsorship and endorsements.

**Any advice for either?** Embrace the new generation with a technology-first approach. More streaming, more social engagement and much more creativity with events being held to encourage teams or ideas to grow a community where people can collaborate without being judged based on their rating.

**Can chess make one happy?** No. But it can help you find peace when your life (school, job, etc) is stressful.

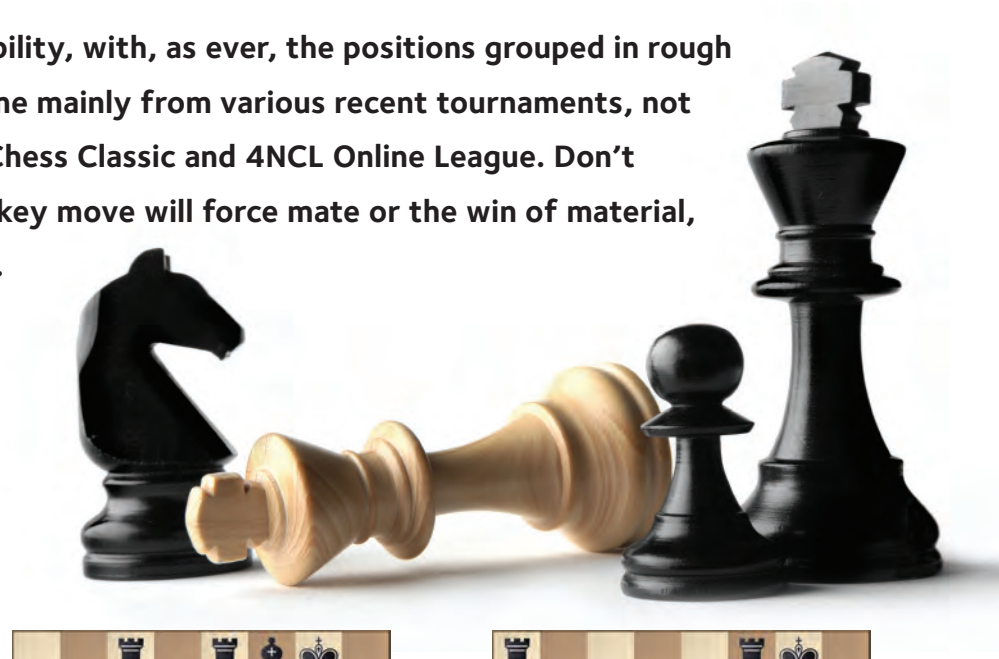
**A tip please for the club player:** Stop wasting time with openings!

*Matthew Webb and Andrew Wainwright have recently set up a dedicated centre for Chess based in Ilkley - see Home News.*

# Find the Winning Moves

**24 puzzles to test your tactical ability, with, as ever, the positions grouped in rough order of difficulty. The games come mainly from various recent tournaments, not least the Candidates, the New in Chess Classic and 4NCL Online League. Don't forget that whilst sometimes the key move will force mate or the win of material, other times it will just win a pawn.**

**Solutions on pages 54.**



## Warm-up Puzzles

**(1) L.Webb-M.Handley**
4NCL Online League 2021
*White to Play*

**(2) V.Mikhalevski-M.Bartel**
European Online Club Cup 2021
*Black to Play*

**(3) G.Zhao-A.Krishnan**
Junior Online 4NCL League 2021
*White to Play*

**(4) A.Saric-M.Sebenik**
Austrian League 2021
*Black to Play*

**(5) J.Cole-D.Deary**
4NCL Online League 2021
*Black to Play*

**(6) A.Suarez Real-C.Sielecki**
4NCL Online League 2021
*White to Play*

## Intermediate Puzzles for the Club Player - Solutions on page 54

**(7) V.Fedoseev-J.K.Duda**
European Online Club Cup 2021
*Black to Play*

**(8) M.Vachier-Lagrave-Wang Hao**
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
*White to Play*

**(9) N.Krishna Teja-M.Savic**
Arandjelovac 2021
*White to Play and Draw*

**(10) E.Karumazondo-J.Adair**
4NCL Online League 2021
*White to Play*

**(11) L.Aronian-J.K.Duda**
New in Chess Classic 2021
*White to Play*

**(12) M.Vachier-Lagrave-K.Alekseenko**
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
*White to Play*

**(13) R.Wojtaszek-G.Gajewski**
Polish Championship, Bydgoszcz 2021
*White to Play*

**(14) R.Praggnanandhaa-L.Tristan**
Titled Tuesday Blitz 2021
*White to Play*

**(15) I.Lysyj-Z.Tekeyev**
Sochi 2021
*White to Play*

## Harder Puzzles for the Club Player – Solutions on page 54

**(16) V.Sanal-P.Nikac**
Niksic 2021
*White to Play*

**(17) N.Abasov-M.Iskandarov**
Nakhchivan 2021
*Black to Play*

**(18) M.Mosadeghpour-A.Daghli**
Iranian Online Championship 2021
*Black to Play and Draw*

**(19) P.Talsma-J.Adair**
4NCL Online League 2021
*White to Play*

**(20) L.Aronian-W.So**
New in Chess Classic 2021
*White to Play*

**(21) L.Aronian-W.So**
New in Chess Classic 2021
*Black to Play and Draw*

**(22) K.Alekseenko-Ding Liren**
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
*White to Play*

**(23) A.Grischuk-M.Vachier-Lagrave**
Yekaterinburg Candidates 2021
*White to Play*

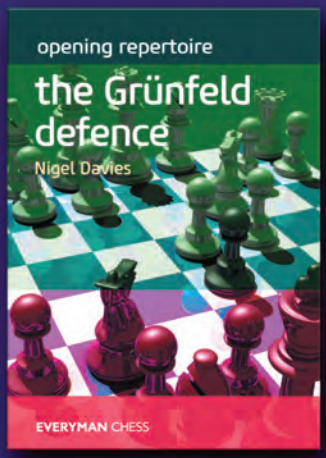
**(24) I.Nepomniachtchi-M.Carlsen**
Magnus Carlsen Invitational 2021
*Black to Play*

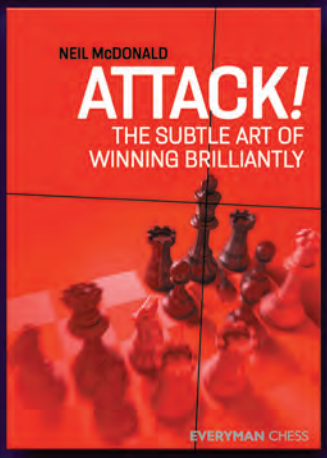
# NEW TITLES

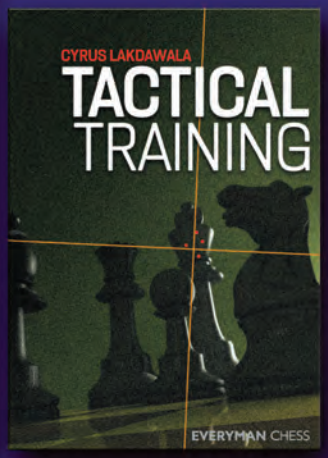
## OUT NOW

*"In summary, play the Budapest Gambit is a comprehensive look at the main line and the Fajarowicz Gambit in a refreshingly objective way... One of the author's best works."*
John Upham,
BritishChessNews.com

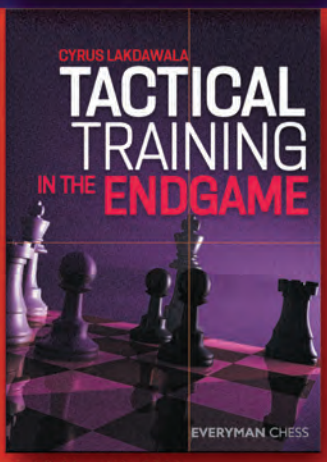
*"This is arguably Andrew Martin's best work to date"*
Chess Magazine



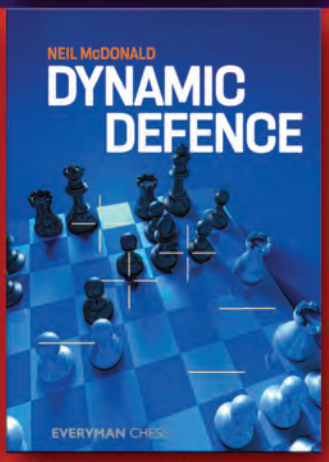



## COMING SOON




Publishing July 2021

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# Never Mind the Grandmasters...

## Here come the amateurs - by Carl Portman (carl.portman@hotmail.co.uk)

We chess players are very fortunate. During 'Covid Lockdown' many of us, short of fresh games, took the opportunity to dig into our databases or notebooks and examine games from years long passed. We can scrutinise the 'then' and apply the 'now' to our games and in most cases learn where we have matured in both thinking and playing strength. As I scrolled down, I arrived at the year 1988, where a county game caught my eye.

There is only one line of annotation and it declares "My first ever game for the county first team, and a win at that." The county was Shropshire and we were paired against the Lincolnshire first team. I have commented before that back in the day it was a massive privilege to represent the county and one actually received a letter saying words to the effect of 'Congratulations, you have been selected'.

I thought that I would analyse and annotate the game today, over three decades later. I was in my early twenties. I used to wear a red leather jacket and I grew my hair. Heavy metal and chess were a very potent and influential mix, and remain so. I provide an admittedly poor-quality photograph from my days wearing that jacket at GKN Sankey chess club in Telford. Those really were the days.

Let us look at the game, but cut me some slack please. I was only graded 126 BCF and the game will reveal errors on either side. I note that my opponent was graded 138, which at the time seemed to be quite strong to me.

**M.Smith-C.Portman**
Lincolnshire vs Shropshire 1988
*French Defence*

**1 e4 e6**

The trusty French Defence. It was lambasted in many quarters back in the 1980s, but here in 2021 it seems to be making a comeback even at elite levels.

**2 d4 a6!?**

Now try to contain your laughter, dear reader. This is a viable if very curious move. It aims to put the opponent off balance. It's also flexible and can transpose into other openings. I note that French GM Christian Bauer plays this on occasion.

**3 ♘c3 d5**

I am amused to see that *Fat Fritz 2* recommends 3...b5 here.

**4 ♘f3 ♗b4**

4...♘f6 is the first choice, but I wanted something different.

*No, it's not Tony Miles, but rather a young Carl Portman facing a rather offbeat opening.*

**5 e5 c5 6 a3 ♗xc3+**

6...♗a5 is also possible. I recall watching a tournament online where Alexander Grischuk was interviewed. He said that in Russia this was considered a "Joke" line, but I don't think it can that bad, can it? 7 dxc5 ♗xc3+ 8 bxc3 ♕c7 9 ♕d4 ♘e7 10 ♗d3 ♘bc6 11 ♕g4 ♘g6 was the sort of line I used to get into. I mean, White has an advantage, I will admit that, but there is nothing forcing and the game is afoot.

**7 bxc3 ♕a5**

Going through some of the games of the late, great Wolfgang Uhlmann, he used to play the queen to a5 in many of his French games. It's a key square and often better than b6, which is also a natural square to place the queen, exerting pressure as it does on d4.

**8 ♗d2**

I didn't quite understand some of the nuances of my favourite opening. What should Black play now? White might want to play c3-c4 himself, with the threat to the queen (so why did she go to a5 anyway?), and it looks a bit nervy.

**8...c4?!**

This move is about as 'Anti-French' as you can get. It flies in the face of the point of the opening, which is to pressure the centre on d4. Instead, Black closes the queenside. If he castles, White will literally throw the kitchen sink at the black monarch on g8, often with successful results. On the other hand, he cannot put his bishop on d3, attacking the pawn on h7. He must therefore do something else with his bishop. Yet how and where is Black ever going to create an advantage, let alone win? As always in chess a move provides both benefits and drawbacks, and we have to weigh those up as we battle.

What then if I had played something else? 8...♘c6 and are we worried about 9 c4 now? The queen slips back to c7 and after 9...♕c7 10 cxd5 exd5 White has the bishop-pair, but Black has some choices also. I think that this is the sort of position that masters would labour over for hours trying to work out who is better, and why.

**9 ♗e2 b5**

Looking back, there is actually no need for this move. I should be thinking about developing a piece first, but I wished to prevent a3-a4, not that White can't play it anyway.

**10 0-0**

10 ♘g5 is a *Fat Fritz* recommendation and now, Black will need to be careful. There are several moves available including 10...♖a7, 10...♘c6 and 10...h6, but you have to have some nerves to play it from here. 10...h6 11 ♘h3 ♘d7 with an advantage for White or, instead of 10 ♘g5, 10 a4 bxa4 11 ♖a2 ♗d7 and game on.

**10...h6 11 h4!**

I am giving my opponent an exclamation mark. His king is perfectly safe, and Black's pieces are some way away from their own king. This gives the green light for White to begin operations, and the king hunt is on. Black doesn't sneer, but believes he will be fine. Much of the French Defence is about counterattack. Let White have his day in the sun first, but he will have to put up with the blisters.

**11...♘e7 12 h5**

Harry the h-pawn existed long before he was officially awarded that name. He is a child of time. Welcome to the new world, Harry!

**12...♘bc6 13 ♘h4**

White wants to break in somehow.

**13...♗d7**

Now, Black has a choice of castling options or he can keep his king in the centre.

**14 f4**

Like a greyhound from the traps, the f-pawn froths at the mouth to catch the rabbit.

**14...0-0-0**

Black finally gives his address to the opposition. My king is here, do your worst, but be careful not to overreach in desperation! With this one move, instead of moving pieces closer to the king, Black moves the king closer to his pieces.

**15 ♗g4**

**15...g6!**

Now I am affording myself the luxury of an exclam. Black wants to open some lines towards the white king, since he has created so many entry squares into his own headquarters. I am not saying that I am much better at this skill today, but back in 1988 I didn't have the savviness to open up the opposition position efficiently enough. Today I focus on themes like 'removing the defender', such as a knight on f3 or f6.

**16 hxg6**

Computer engines help and they don't help. *Fat Fritz* suggests (amongst other options) 16 ♔f2, but who would play that in a real game? You would? OK, you are stronger than me, well done.

**16...fxg6 17 ♕f3?!**

Now look. I am not saying this is dubious, blame *Fritz*! Let's look at why (as if I know). First of all it tells me that the queen has been moved to the wrong wing and if anything she should go to c1 or b1. Why? Well, engines don't tell us why, do they? That's why I prefer human coaches to be honest. What I can say is that with this move, White has changed from a slight advantage to equality, but I don't really care – we are never going to be able to fathom why.

In human terms all I recommend is that we ask, what is Black trying to do? What is White trying to do? How will they get there? I can see that moving the queen to b1, for example, simply switches the attack, Capablanca style from one wing to another. After all, that's where the black king is.

**17...♖dg8 18 ♕h3**

Breaking news. The queen was played to f3 and h3 to intimidate the pawn on e6. There's nothing wrong with White's approach to my mind, but as ever in the French, Black has resources.

**18...♘f5**

White is about to suffer from cognitive dissonance. He thinks that after such a good opening he should be winning, but he cannot see a way through. He still believes he holds the advantage and despite the evidence to the contrary before him on the board, he tries to drive a tank into the enemy territory.

**19 ♗xf5?!**

It's not good. It opens lines. Chess players love open files.

**19...gxf5**

This is exactly the kind of position I would show to my beginner students. I would remove everything from the board except the pawns and discuss structure, pawn islands, connected, passed and doubled pawns. Then we would play the position only with pawns to see who could win, if anyone.

**20 ♕e3 ♖g4**

Greedy, materialistic, soulless *Fritz* wants to play 20...♕a4 and target the little soldier on c2. Come on, we are but human. We don't care for pawns. Why open a tin of sardines when a fresh trout lies before us?

**21 ♗e1 ♖hg8 22 ♔h2**

White's promising opening position has evaporated and it looks like someone threw a black blanket over the fire, smothering and sucking the energy out of his position.

**22...♕d8 23 ♔h3**

23 g3 was perhaps a better choice.

**23...♕e8**

Now it is Black who smells blood. The position is tense now and White has to be careful.

**24 a4??**

A catastrophe. What was he thinking of? Now was not the time to try to start a counterattack. Clearly White believed his defensive work to have concluded, leaving him room to advance across the battlefield. Many a General has been deluded in this way.

**24...♕h5 25 axb5??**

White still has scales over his eyes and they are responsible for the downfall of the empire. Blinded by the urge from the very first move to prove superiority over the mighty French Defence, he continues to pistol whip his way through the jungle of the a- and b-files. Sadly, the real action concludes elsewhere. White's 25th move simply allows mate in three.

**25...♖xh4+!**

Avast, ye varlet.

**26 ♗xh4 ♕g4+ 27 ♔h2 ♕xg2# 0-1**

A nice little finish. Black can and does live on the edge in the French Defence, but counter-offensives, especially when White becomes frustrated, can be great fun.

I cannot remember how I felt after this battle. I suspect I would have been very happy, and my captain would have congratulated me for securing a point for Shropshire in my first game. I still have a red leather jacket, but not the original. I might just wear it at a tournament to see who reads this column.

# Two Tournaments... Only One Winner

## The Champ roared back to his very best to dominate the fifth leg of the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour, then doubled up in the subsequent FTX Crypto Cup

Play Magnus AS have acquired not just Everyman Chess and Ginger GM this year, but even that leading international chess publisher, New in Chess. As such, come late April, the fifth leg of the Champions Chess Tour was named in their honour. Looking more relaxed than in the previous events, possibly helped by playing from the Meltwater HQ in Oslo, Carlsen felt "comfortable".

### New in Carlsen

At last the champ was able to string together a consistent and high-level performance, and pretty much dominated proceedings from beginning to end. Carlsen ground away to score an undefeated 10½/15, only really appearing in trouble against teenage qualifier Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa, to top the now-customary preliminary all-play-all, by a point from Nakamura and a rejuvenated Shakhriyar Mamedyarov.

Carlsen appeared unimpressed when FIDE unveiled Teimour Radjabov as the first into the 2022 Candidates tournament, which added some extra spice when the two met at the quarter-final stage. It was no great surprise that there were seven largely hard-fought and well played draws, but Carlsen won the sixth game and so advanced 1.5-0.5 after Radjabov deployed a surprisingly provocative gambit as Black

**M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov**
2nd set; Game 2
*Nimzo-Indian Defence*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 d5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 ♕xc3 c5!?**

The Romanishin Gambit. Carlsen proves, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be rather well prepared for this surprise.

**7 dxc5 d4 8 ♕c2 e5 9 e3 ♘c6 10 b4 0-0 11 ♘f3 ♖e8** Nimzo players may wish to explore both 11...♕e7, with the idea of 12 e4 a5 13 b5 ♘d8, and 11...♗g4!?.

**12 e4!**

Closing the centre. Now Black really does need to try 12...♗g4. Instead, Radjabov is quickly squashed.

**12...a5? 13 b5!**

A major improvement over 13 ♖b1 axb4 14 axb4 ♗g4 15 ♘d2 ♘h5 16 b5? d3! 17 ♕xd3 ♘d4, which already left White in huge trouble in Lazarev-Romanishin, Arco 1999 – one of the first games that really put 6...c5 7 dxc5 d4 on the map.

**13...♘e7**

13...♘b8 14 a4 ♘bd7 15 ♗a3 also feels rather miserable for Black.

**14 a4**

Freeing a3 for the bishop and the prelude to the upcoming powerful positional pawn sacrifice.

**14...♕c7 15 ♗a3 ♘d7 16 c6!**

**New in Chess Classic Preliminary, 24 April to 2 May 2021 (Category XX, average rating = 2728)**

| | Player | Country | Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | Pts | TPR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Magnus Carlsen | NOR | 2847 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 10.5 | 2868 |
| 2 | Hikaru Nakamura | USA | 2736 | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 9.5 | 2822 |
| 3 | Shakhriyar Mamedyarov | AZE | 2770 | ½ | 0 | * | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 9.5 | 2819 |
| 4 | Wesley So | USA | 2770 | ½ | ½ | 1 | * | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 2796 |
| 5 | Levon Aronian | ARM | 2781 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 9 | 2796 |
| 6 | Teimour Radjabov | AZE | 2765 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 8.5 | 2775 |
| 7 | Alireza Firouzja | FID | 2759 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 1 | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8.5 | 2775 |
| 8 | Le Quang Liem | VIE | 2709 | 0 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 8.5 | 2778 |
| 9 | Leinier Dominguez Perez | USA | 2758 | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 8 | 2746 |
| 10 | Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa | IND | 2608 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 0 | * | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 7 | 2714 |
| 11 | Jan-Krzysztof Duda | POL | 2729 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | 0 | * | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2706 |
| 12 | Santosh Gujrathi Vidit | IND | 2726 | ½ | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | * | ½ | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 2706 |
| 13 | Aryan Tari | NOR | 2639 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | 1 | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | 1 | 7 | 2712 |
| 14 | Sergey Karjakin | RUS | 2757 | ½ | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 0 | * | 1 | 1 | 6.5 | 2675 |
| 15 | Gawain Jones | ENG | 2670 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | * | ½ | 3 | 2491 |
| 16 | Johan-Sebastian Christiansen | NOR | 2618 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | * | 1.5 | 236 |

Without this powerful device, Black would likely be OK, but now he simply finds himself squeezed to death on the queenside.

**16...bxc6 17 c5!**

White is going to obtain a mighty passed b-pawn.

**17...♘f6 18 b6 ♕b7 19 ♗c4 ♘g6 20 0-0 ♕d7**

Likewise, after 20...♘f4 21 ♗c1 ♘6h5 22 g3 ♘h3+ 23 ♔g2 White would have been all set to take control with ♘e1-d3.

**21 ♘e1!**

Confirming Carlsen's dominance. The knight heads for the ideal blockade square on d3 and, sooner or later, the f2(f3)-f4 advance is going to dismantle the black set-up.

**21...♗a6 22 ♗xa6 ♖xa6 23 f3**

Shoring up e4 and keeping Black out of g4.

**23...♘f4 24 ♖d1 ♖aa8 25 ♗c1**

Improving his worst-placed piece ahead of beginning to take over on the kingside.

**25...♘6h5 26 g3 ♘g6 27 ♘d3 ♘f6 28 ♗g5 h5?**

Desperation, having been completely outplayed, although even after 28...♕e6 29 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 30 ♖de1 and only then 31 f4 (or even 31 ♔g2 and h2-h4), Black surely wouldn't have survived.

**29 ♗xf6 gxf6 30 f4! exf4 31 ♘xf4 ♕g4**

Black's kingside wouldn't have lasted long after 31...♘xf4 32 ♖xf4 ♖e6 33 ♕d3 ♖d8 34 ♖df1 ♕e7 35 ♖f5.

**32 ♖xd4 h4 33 ♕d1!**

Continuing to maintain full control and already Radjabov might well have raised the white flag.

**33...♕g5 34 ♕h5 ♕e5 35 ♖d7 hxg3 36 hxg3 ♕xe4 37 ♘xg6 ♕e3+ 38 ♔h2 ♕e2+ 39 ♕xe2 ♖xe2+ 40 ♔h3 fxg6 41 ♖xf6 1-0**

Carlsen's semi-final victory over Levon Aronian wasn't totally smooth, but again he progressed 1.5-0.5. In the opening set Carlsen had secured a breakthrough victory in Game 3, only for Aronian to immediately hit back, and with the aid of the London System no less – a result which inflicted on Carlsen his first rapid defeat in some 27 games. The second saw the champ win the final two games, outmanoeuvring the American-bound Armenian in the first of those ahead of annihilating his winning try.

♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖ ♖

## M.Carlsen-L.Aronian

2nd set; Game 4

*Sicilian Rossolimo*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♗b5+ ♘c6 4 0-0 ♗d7 5 ♖e1 e5 6 c3 g5?**

There are some anti-Sicilian lines in which Black can get away with this advance (4 ♗xc6+ bxc6 5 0-0 e5 6 c3 g5!? being one), but here it just doesn't seem to work.

**7 d4! g4 8 ♘fd2 exd4?**

Black is quickly lost after this unfortunate novelty. Even 8...h5 9 d5 ♘ce7 10 a4 followed by ♘c4 looks lovely for White, as does 8...cxd4 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 cxd4, although here we dare say that 10...h5!? might be tried.

**9 ♘a3!?**

Heading for c4 as White enjoys easy and excellent play for his pawn.

**9...♕f6 10 cxd4 cxd4 11 e5!?**

Carlsen can't resist, although there was nothing wrong with the simple 11 ♘ac4 followed by ♘b3 and/or ♗xc6 ♗xc6; e5 with a huge advantage for White.

**11...dxe5 12 ♘ac4 0-0-0 13 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 14 ♘xe5 ♗d5?**

It's quickly a rout after this, although even 14...♘e7 15 ♕xg4+ ♕f5!? 16 ♕xf5+ ♘xf5 17 ♘xf7 ♖g8 18 g3 ♖d5 19 ♘e5 would have left White a pawn ahead and running the show.

**15 ♕xg4+ ♕e6**

White's coordination and domination are also the key factors of the position after 15...♗e6 16 ♕g3 h5 17 ♘e4 h4 18 ♕f4.

**16 ♕xe6+ ♗xe6 17 ♘df3 ♗b4 18 ♖d1**

Material might be level, but White is pretty much winning due to the target on d4 and especially the vulnerable black king position.

**18...♖d5**

18...♘e7 completes development, but after 19 ♗g5 ♖hg8 20 ♗f6! the d-pawn will fall and that's just for starters.

**19 ♗f4 ♗c5 20 ♖ac1 ♔d8**

**21 ♘xf7+!**

A neat way to collect the exchange.

**21...♗xf7 22 ♗e5 ♘e7 23 ♗xh8 ♘c6 24 ♖xc5!**

Far from forced, but simplest. The opposite-coloured bishop ending will be an easy win with the two extra pawns connected and mobile.

**24...♖xc5 25 ♘xd4 ♔c7 26 ♘xc6 ♔xc6 27 a3 ♖d5 28 ♖xd5 ♔xd5 29 f3 ♔c4 30 ♔f2 ♔d3 31 ♗c3 b5 32 g4 a6 33 ♔g3 ♔e3 34 f4 ♔e4 35 f5 h5 36 h3 hxg4 37 hxg4 1-0**

The dream final from the perspective of the large internet audience saw Carlsen take on Hikaru Nakamura, who had eliminated Le Quang Liem and Mamedyarov. The leading chess streamer needed all his famed defensive skills to survive in the opening game, but after a second draw Carlsen proved too strong, Nakamura blundering under pressure while holding a tricky endgame in which Carlsen had sacrificed a bishop for three pawns and especially the initiative. The return was a little curious as the tension clearly affected both players.

## H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen

1st set; Game 4

Carlsen has been outmanoeuvred and now 28 ♗c3 or even 28 ♘f4 would have left White dominating the board. Instead, Nakamura was to allow some counterplay.

**28 f3?**

Hoping for 28...♕xe3? 29 ♗f2 ♕h6 30 f4 followed by picking off c6, but Black doesn't have to exploit the newly-created weakness on e3 immediately.

**28...♘d5! 29 ♕xc6!?**

Brave if critical, since 29 ♗xd5 cxd5 would remove Black's major weakness on the c-file and he must be OK after 30 ♗f2 ♕b7.

**29...♘xe3+ 30 ♔h1 ♕b8 31 ♗f2?**

31 ♗c3! would still have been prudent, since Black can't get away with 31...♗xg3? 32 ♖g1.

**31...♗xb2 32 ♗xe3 ♗xc1 33 ♗xc1?**

Even after 33 ♕xc1 ♕c8 Black would have been clearly for choice in view of his play on both flanks.

**33...♖c8?**

Missing his chance. 33...♕c8! was simply very strong in view of 34 ♕xc8 (34 ♕xb5 ♘d4! is a killer, as is even 34 ♕d5 ♘d4!) 34...♖xc8 35 ♗xe6 ♖c2! when after, for example, 36 ♗d7 ♖xe2 White must give up a piece to avoid allowing Black's queenside majority to break through with 37 ♗f4 b4.

**34 ♕e4 ♕d6 35 ♗e3?!**

It wasn't so easy to coordinate White's pieces in a matter of seconds (the time control was once again 15 minutes each, with a 10-second increment per move), but 35 ♗b2 ♕d1+ 36 ♔g2 ♖c2 37 ♔f2 ♖xb2 38 ♗xe6 would have seized some much-needed counterplay in the nick of time, and even simpler is the calm 35 ♔g2!, and if 35...♖xc1 36 ♘xc1 ♕d2+ 37 ♕e2 ♕xc1 38 ♗xe6 fxe6 39 ♕xe6+ with perpetual check.

**35...♕d1+**

35...♖e8!? would also have left Black calling the shots, even if White should be able to survive here too with accurate defence.

**36 ♘g1 ♕c2**

**37 ♕d5?**

Dropping a piece and the game. 37 ♕xc2? ♖xc2 38 ♗xe6 fxe6 39 ♗f4 b4! would also have lost, but 37 ♗xe6! ♕xe4 38 fxe4 (and not 38 ♗xf7+? ♔xf7 39 fxe4 ♖c3) 38...fxe6 39 ♗d2! ♖c4 40 ♘f3 ♖xe4 41 ♔g2 would have left White with definite chances to save the game now that he has secured the queenside situation.

**37...♖d8 0-1**

Nakamura gave his fans hope with a largely crushing victory to open the second set, but must have regretted repeating moves when quickly better as Black in Game 2. An impetuous advance of Harry was refuted in clinical style by the champ as Black before Carlsen also dominated Game 4, but agreed to a draw in an overwhelming position to tie the set and so secure the match and the small matter of the $30,000 first prize.

**H.Nakamura-M.Carlsen**
2nd set; Game 3
*Queen's Gambit Declined*

**1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 a6!?**

A recent Carlsen favourite.

**4 cxd5 exd5 5 ♗f4 ♘f6 6 e3 ♗d6 7 ♗xd6 ♕xd6 8 ♗d3 ♗g4!?**

Provocative, but Black often can sacrifice the b7-pawn in these Exchange QGD lines where the dark-squared bishops have come off.

**9 ♕b3 ♘c6 10 h3**

10 ♕xb7 ♖b8 11 ♕xa6 ♘b4!? 12 ♕a4+ ♔e7 13 ♗e2 ♗f5 14 ♖c1 ♖a8 looks like a lot of compensation with the white kingside still asleep.

**10...♗h5 11 ♘ge2**

Heading for f4. Carlsen takes immediate steps to prevent that strong plan.

**11...♗xe2 12 ♘xe2 0-0 13 ♖c1 ♘d8!**

Freeing the c-pawn for action while heading for the kingside via e6.

**14 ♕a3!**

Nakamura counters well and maintains a small edge, as now 14...♕xa3?! 15 bxa3 c6 16 ♔d2 would see Black coming under pressure down the b-file while White might well expand too with g2-g4.

**14...♕d7 15 0-0 g6 16 ♘f4 ♖e8 17 ♗c2 c6 18 ♘d3 ♘e6 19 f4!?**

Thematic expansion for such a structure, although now Black will always have chances to obtain counterplay on the kingside.

**19...♘g7 20 f5**

20 ♘e5 feels more secure and normal, although Black should be OK here too after 20...♕c7 21 ♕c3 ♖e7.

**20...g5!**

Keeping lines closed while denying White the easy play 20...gxf5 21 ♘e5 ♕e6 22 ♖f2 would have allowed him.

**21 ♘e5 ♕c7 22 h4?**

This turns out to be a serious positional mistake. Instead, nothing too terrible would have happened to White had he improved the queen with 22 ♕b4.

**22...g4! 23 ♕c3 ♘gh5 24 ♕e1**

Black would also have limbered up for a strong exchange sacrifice after 24 ♖fe1 ♖e7! 25 b4 ♖ae8.

**24...♖xe5! 25 dxe5 ♕xe5**

White is already positionally lost, with his bishop and rooks almost reduced to the role of bystanders and all the while Nakamura must have been regretting advancing his h-pawn.

**26 ♕c3 ♕g3 27 ♕e1 ♕d6 28 ♕f2 ♖e8**

Inviting the final piece to the party. There's absolutely no need to rush with White devoid of counterplay.

**29 ♖cd1 ♕e5 30 ♖d4 c5 31 ♖d2 ♘g3 32 ♖fd1 ♔f8!?**

Or just 32...♔g7. Black has all the time in the world to strengthen his position ahead of deciding how to break through.

**33 ♖d3**

Now the knights invade, but if 33 ♕f4? ♘e2+! 34 ♖xe2 ♕xf4 or 33 ♕e1 b5 34 ♖c1 d4!.

**33...♘fe4 34 ♕e1 ♕f6!**

It's high time to swap Black's crushing bind for a decisive attack.

**35 ♖xd5 ♕xh4 36 ♗xe4 ♕h1+ 37 ♔f2 ♘xe4+ 38 ♔e2 ♕xg2+ 39 ♔d3 0-1**

39...b5 is unsurprisingly absolutely hopeless.

## Cripes, it's Crypto – and Carlsen struggling?

It was probably only a matter of time before the worlds of chess and Bitcoin collided, and in late May the FTX Crypto Cup saw a record prize-fund for an online chess event. The Tour's third and final 'Major' boasted some $320,000 in prize money, although $100,000 of that was only available in Bitcoin, with the amount being tracked as the tournament wore on.

Whether it was again caused by too much late-night bullet or some other distraction, Carlsen could only describe his play on the opening day as "awful". The champ did begin

by outplaying Mamedyarov, but then allowed his upcoming title challenger off the hook, Nepomniachtchi somehow managed to save an endgame an exchange down. Worse was to come as after surprising Maxime Vachier-Lagrave with 1 e4 c5 2 ♘c3 d6 3 f3!?, Carlsen was simply outplayed and, most unusually especially as White, never really in the game.

The jury was out at the start of the second day, was the world champion wheeling out the Orangutan of all openings a sign he was on tilt or just a desire for something fresh? Whichever the case, 1 b4 e5 2 ♗b2 ♗xb4 3 ♗xe5 ♘f6 4 c3!? ♗e7 5 g3 didn't turn out too badly against Anish Giri. Carlsen even won a pawn, but uncharacteristically couldn't convert a winning endgame.

Matters improved somewhat as Carlsen outplayed Alexander Grischuk with a more restrained opening move of the b-pawn, as covered by John Henderson earlier in these pages, before he out-calculated bogey opponent Dubov to reach '+2' only to immediately collapse and lose a complex endgame to Aronian, which he described as a "self-inflicted wound".

The third day was no better for the champ, who began by somehow failing to win a game against Nakamura which the commentators had long written off as simply won.

## M.Carlsen-H.Nakamura
Round 11

Black's kingside counterplay has been causing Carlsen serious difficulties converting his extra exchange and after 43...♘8d7 Nakamura would have enjoyed full compensation with Delroy securely under lock and key. Instead, sensing nervousness, the Twitch star elected to make a rather risky winning try.

**43...e4? 44 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 45 ♖d5 ♕c8**

Unfortunately for Black, 45...♕h3 is foiled by 46 ♕h5.

**46 b6 e3!**

A final roll of the dice.

**47 d7**

It's much, much easier for an engine than a human to judge in a couple of seconds that there aren't any tricks after 47 fxe3 fxe3 48 d7 ♘xd7 49 ♖2d3 e2 50 ♔f2 when White is winning.

**47...♘xd7**

**48 ♖d1?**

Throwing away most of his advantage. The cold-blooded 48 fxe3! fxe3 49 ♖2d3 was still winning and 48 ♖c2!? would also have left White with good chances of eventually emerging with the full point in view of 48...♘xb6 49 ♖xd8+ ♕xd8 50 ♘e6!.

**48...e2 49 ♖e1 ♘e5!**

The champ had presumably missed this shot which forces him to return the exchange.

**50 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 51 ♔g2?**

A slightly strange choice, but rattled Carlsen presumably didn't trust 51 ♖xe2 ♕h3 52 ♖e1 and may also have missed 52 ♖d2!? when 52...♖g8 53 ♕d5 leaves White pressing, but with plenty of play left.

**51...♖f8 ½-½**

Nakamura's draw offer seems fair enough, the two mighty passed pawns on the seventh cancelling each other out after 52 ♕e7 ♗xc7 53 bxc7 ♖e8.

Three draws followed, although Carlsen was fortunate to survive a surely lost endgame against Peter Svidler. That left the champ needing to win to order against Teimour Radjabov to qualify for the knock-out stage. Powerful manoeuvring and a strong exchange sacrifice saw Carlsen obtain a winning position, only for him to blunder by allowing Radjabov to favourably return the exchange and reach a drawn queen endgame. Was Magnus set to fail to qualify for the quarter-finals for the first time ever in two seasons of the Tour?

## M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov
Round 15

Black should be holding after 44...♔g7,

# A little bird just told me

**A round-up of what the top players and chess personalities have been saying on Twitter**

**Malcolm Pein - @TelegraphChess**
@Kasparov63 will play the Blitz section of the @GrandChessTour in Croatia! Ivan Saric to play the Rapid.

**FIDE - @FIDE_chess**
Congratulations to GM Humpy Koneru of India and GM Kateryna Lagno of Russia on qualifying to the Women's Candidates Tournament 2022 from the FIDE Women's Grand Prix Series 2019-20.

**Yan Nepomniachtchi - @lachesisq**
Great performance from Wesley, impeccable calculation today, congrats on reaching the finals! Looking forward to witness the finals and especially upcoming Bucharest #GrandChessTour OTB battles! #FTXCryptoCup #ChessChamps

**Hikaru Nakamura - @GMHikaru**
I didn't win today, but through my stream @care won. Thanks to @anna_chess and @gothamchess for their amazing commentary and fundraising. Congrats to @magnuscarlsen for a great battle. See you on stream tomorrow!

**Magnus Carlsen - @MagnusCarlsen**
Thanks for another great battle, till next time!

**John Saunders - @johnchess**
Who needs Euro2020 when they've got the #GelfandChallenge on Twitch? With @DavidHowellGM, @thelittlehat and Boris Gelfand - great entertainment.

**David Howell - @DavidHowellGM**
Final stretch of the 24-hour marathon. Looking good for @Atomrod! Not too late to join or donate to @BritishRedCross

**Carl Portman - @Carl_Portman**
I have my work for the weekend. I am giving Keith's book a 'guard of honour' in recognition of his fabulous endgame skills.

**Judit Polgar - @GMJuditPolgar**
Scottish musician Dougie MacLean's song 'Marching Mystery' was inspired by ancient chess pieces found on the Isle of Lewis 190 years ago. The inspirational power of chess is amazing! #ChessConnectsUs

**2700chess - @2700chess**
Happy 18th Birthday to Alireza Firouzja (2759 Elo, World #12)! He is the youngest player amongst the current Top-100. In January, Alireza's TPR at @tatasteelchess was 2806.

but instead Radjabov was to join the long line of players who have misjudged the transition to a pawn ending and paid the price for doing so.

**44...♕e6?? 45 ♕xe6 fxe6 46 f4! ♔f7 47 ♔f2 b5 48 ♔e3 ♔g6 49 g4**

Keeping Black's king at bay ahead of making inroads on the other flank.

**49...b4**

49...♔g7 can also be met by 50 ♔d2-c3 or even 50 d4!?, and if 50...c4 51 f5 b4 52 ♔d2 when White's pawns will clearly triumph.

**50 ♔d2 e5 51 fxe5 ♔xg5 52 ♔c2 1-0**

Radjabov had seen enough. 52...♔g6 53 ♔b3 ♔g5 54 d4! is not so hard to calculate.

## They Just Keep Winning

Scraping through by half a point saw Carlsen face Nakamura once again in the quarter-finals, the American speedster having finished on 9/15 in the preliminaries, as did Giri, Vachier-Lagrave and So, although they were all a point behind Fabiano Caruana who impressed while playing his first online chess in some eight months, such had been his dedication to the Candidates. The American no.1 would go on to be eliminated by Nepomniachtchi in an Armageddon game and Carlsen also provided plenty of drama en route to qualifying for the semi-finals. First blood went to Nakamura who routed Carlsen after Black never managed to castle in an Open Lopez. Carlsen's response was no less emphatic, as we also saw earlier in these pages.

A switch to the Berlin didn't bring the champ any respite as he was ground down, but then he scored a fourth successive win for White, doing so on demand to tie the opening set as Nakamura was simply swept aside in another Giuoco. Set two began with a bang – a win for Black after Carlsen made an overly optimistic sacrifice. Game 2 saw Carlsen in early trouble, but after hurling Harry down the board he was able to turn things round to make it 1-1. Possibly sensing he had the initiative in the match, Carlsen returned to 1 b4, but it failed to impress, White needing to rely on the famed power of opposite-coloured bishops to hold on. A fairly solid draw meant a blitz play-off and here Nakamura had absolutely no answer, being crushed in both games as Carlsen set up a rematch with Radjabov.

Unlike their New in Chess match, this time there was a fair bit of blood on the board, Carlsen outpowering the Azeri ace as White in Game 3 only for Radjabov to impressively rally, quickly winning a pawn after some fine early use of Harry (1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘f3 d5 4 ♘c3 ♗b4 5 ♗g5 h6 6 ♗xf6 ♕xf6 7 ♕a4+ ♘c6 8 e3 0-0 9 ♖c1 ♕g6 10 h4), going on to convert and so tie the set. The second, however, went to Carlsen 3-1 and was largely decided by Radjabov blundering in the opening game when under pressure in an endgame.

## Clash of the Leaders

The top two on the Champions Chess Tour leaderboard met in the final of the FTX Crypto Cup, with the small matter of $60,000 at stake. It didn't take long for Carlsen to take the lead.

**W.So-M.Carlsen**
1st set; Game 1
*Giuoco Piano*

**1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 c3 ♘f6 5 d4 exd4 6 e5 d5 7 ♗b5 ♘e4 8 cxd4 ♗b6 9 ♘c3 0-0 10 ♗e3 ♗g4 11 ♕c2**

So improved in Game 3 with 11 h3 ♗h5 12 ♖c1, going on to score a crushing victory after 12...♗a5?! (12...♘e7 or 12...f6!? improves, and here if 13 ♘xd5 ♗a5+) 13 0-0 ♗xc3 14 bxc3 ♘a5 15 g4! ♗g6 16 ♘e1.

**11...♗f5 12 ♕b3 ♘e7 13 0-0 c6**

Shoring up his only vulnerable central spot while creating a path back into the game for the dark-squared bishop.

**14 ♗e2 ♖b8 15 ♘a4**

The immediate 15 ♘h4! was likely the route to an edge, since then 15...f6?? fails to 16 ♘xf5 ♘xf5 17 ♘xe4.

**15...♗c7 16 ♘h4 f6!**

Carlsen is determined to hold his ground on the kingside and now absolutely anything might have happened after 17 f4 g5!?. So tries to avoid such complications.

**17 ♗f3 b5! 18 ♘c3 ♘xc3 19 exf6?!**

Not the greatest ever intermezzo. Moreover, nothing too terrible would have happened to White after 19 ♕xc3! fxe5 20 dxe5, and if 20...b4 (or 20...♗e6 21 ♗e2 and ♘f3) 21 ♕c1 ♗xe5 22 ♘xf5 ♘xf5 23 ♕xc6 ♘xe3 24 fxe3 when a draw would have been the most likely result.

**19...♗e4**

This turns out well, but 19...♕d6! 20 g3 ♕xf6 21 ♕xc3 ♗h3 22 ♗g2 ♗xg2 23 ♘xg2 ♗b6 followed by ...♘f5 would have been even stronger, with advantage to Black.

**20 bxc3 ♕d6 21 g3 ♗xf3**

**22 ♗f4!?**

Raising the stakes. 22 ♘xf3 ♕xf6 23 ♘e5! ♗xe5 24 dxe5 ♕xe5 25 ♗xa7 would have been about equal.

**22...♕xf6 23 ♗xc7 ♖b7 24 ♗e5 ♕f7 25 ♘xf3 ♕xf3 26 ♕b4?**

Black has the fabled attacking duo of queen and knight, and White lacks any real play, so it was time for So to have a short think and aim to obtain some counterplay. The simplest way to do so is 26 ♕c2! ♘f5 27 a4 when 27...h5 can even be met by 28 ♕d1

**26...♘f5 27 ♕c5?**

It would never have happened, but 27 ♕b3 and ♕d1 was by now required it seems.

**27...♖bf7!**

With the rather nasty threat of 28...♘e3!.

**28 ♖ae1 h5!**

Introducing the final and decisive member of the attack, the Ginger GM's favourite pawn, Harry, who is bound for h3.

**29 h3**

There's simply no defence as we can see too from 29 h4 ♘xh4! (or even 29...♖f6!?) 30 gxh4 ♕g4+ 31 ♗g3 ♖xf2! 32 ♕d6 (or 32 ♖xf2 ♕xg3+ 33 ♖g2 ♕xe1+) 32...♖8f3! 33 ♖xf2 ♖xg3+ 34 ♕xg3 ♕xg3+ 35 ♔f1 ♕xc3 when the extra queen and pawns would have proved far too powerful.

**29...h4 30 ♕xc6**

**30...♘xg3!**

Precise as ever, and not 30...hxg3? 31 fxg3 ♕d3 32 ♕xd5 when White would have managed to defend.

**31 ♗xg3**

Hopeless, but of course if 31 fxg3? ♕xf1+ 32 ♖xf1 ♖xf1+ 33 ♔h2 ♖8f2#.

**31...hxg3 32 ♖e8 g2 33 ♖xf8+ ♖xf8 0-1**

Interesting and perhaps mistakenly, Carlsen was happy to take zero risk facing the Berlin in the return. The champ was quick to regret that cautious approach, not for the first time being crushed by So who obtained revenge after 1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗c4 ♗c5 4 c3 ♘f6 5 d4 exd4 6 e5 d5 7 ♗b5, as we saw above. Incidentally this semi-topical line is recommended by Gawain Jones in his upcoming *Coffeehouse Repertoire* for Quality Chess.

Clearly far from his best, Carlsen repeated all 29 moves of Game 2 in the fourth game to leave the match evenly poised. The second set was no less curious. So was outplayed in the opener only to hit straight back with his favourite anti-Sicilian device, the Rossolimo. The American defended well in Game 3 before being happy to copy Nakamura's favourite drawing variation (1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘c6 3 ♗b5 ♘f6 4 0-0 ♘xe4 5 d4 ♘d6 6 dxe5 ♘xb5 7 a4 ♘bd4 8 ♘xd4 d5 9 exd6 ♘xd4 10 ♕xd4 ♕xd6 11 ♕e4+ ♕e6 12 ♕d4 ♕d6, etc) to force a play-off.

There was nothing wrong with the champ's Orangutan in the first blitz game, but he would fall for a devious back-rank tactic. Was it to be a third Tour title for So? No! Impressively the champ would rally, changing his t-shirt ahead of outplaying So as Black to take the match to Armageddon where his nerve and play once again proved somewhat the stronger, So never recovering from ceding too much space early on. Magnus neatly summed up the dramatic match, pointing out that "It's absolutely insane. I am just so happy to have pulled through."

**W.So-M.Carlsen**
Blitz play-off; Game 2
*Sicilian Moscow*

**1 e4 c5 2 ♘f3 d6 3 ♗b5+ ♘d7 4 0-0 ♘gf6 5 ♖e1 a6 6 ♗f1 b6 7 c4 ♗b7 8 ♘c3 ♘e5!? 9 ♘xe5?!**

A surprising strategic error from So. Moreover, Carlsen had been here before: back in his signature event in March, 9 a3 e6 10 b4 ♗e7 11 ♖b1 ♕c7 12 d3 0-0 13 ♘xe5?! dxe5 14 bxc5 ♗xc5 15 ♘a4 ♗d4 16 ♗e3 ♗xe3 17 fxe3 b5! had given Black the initiative in Nepomniachtchi-Carlsen. Instead, the critical line is likely 9 d4!? ♘xf3+ 10 gxf3 cxd4 11 ♕xd4 when White's activity offsets his ugly kingside.

**9...dxe5 10 d3 e6 11 a3 ♗e7 12 b4 0-0 13 ♖b1 ♘d7 14 ♗e3 ♕c7**

This all feels very logical from both sides and now White's main problem becomes apparent: he lacks a clear plan, in part because of Black's strong central bind.

**15 ♖b2 cxb4! 16 axb4 a5**

Obtaining an outside passed pawn and especially the use of c5 for a minor piece.

**17 bxa5 bxa5 18 ♘b5 ♕d8 19 ♕c2 ♗c6 20 ♖a1 h6**

Creating some luft. It was also possible to be more incisive with 20...♘c5 21 ♕c3 a4!? (Pein).

**21 ♘a7 ♕c7 22 ♘b5**

Black is also extremely comfortable after 22 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 23 ♖b5 ♗b4, and if 24 ♗d2? ♖ab8.

**22...♕c8 23 h3 ♘c5 24 ♖ba2?**

24 ♕c3 a4 echoes Malcolm's idea above. After 25 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 26 ♕xe5 a3 27 ♖b3 Black has promising compensation with his mighty bishops and a-pawn, but still better this than the game for White.

**24...a4!**

Lining up a devious switch of approach, as now after 25 ♗xc5 ♗xc5 26 ♖xa4 ♖xa4 27 ♕xa4 f5! White would have come under heavy pressure on the kingside.

**25 ♕c3?! ♘b3**

Simply threatening to chop the knight, as well as the rook on a1. White is already completely lost.

**26 ♘a7 ♕d7 27 ♘xc6 ♕xc6 28 ♖b1 ♘d4!?**

Not the only strong continuation, but it's notable that Carlsen trusts in having the far superior bishop in an opposite-coloured bishop scenario and certainly 29 ♗xd4 exd4 30 ♕xd4 ♗c5 31 ♕c3 ♖fd8 would have left Black dominating.

**29 f4 f6 30 ♗xd4 exd4 31 ♕c2 a3 32 c5!?**

Desperation, but even this won't come close to saving the day.

**32...♕xc5 33 ♕xc5 ♗xc5 34 ♗e2 ♖fb8 35 ♖c1 ♖b2 36 ♗g4**

A final trap, but Black can, unsurprisingly, do much better than take on a2.

**36...f5! 0-1**

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Player | Country | Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | Pts |
| 1 | Fabiano Caruana | USA | 2820 | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| 2 | Anish Giri | NED | 2780 | 0 | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| 3 | Hikaru Nakamura | USA | 2736 | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | 0 | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 9 |
| 4 | Maxime Vachier-Lagrave | FRA | 2760 | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| 5 | Wesley So | USA | 2770 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| 6 | Magnus Carlsen | NOR | 2847 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | * | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | 8.5 |
| 7 | Teimour Radjabov | AZE | 2765 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 8.5 |
| 8 | Ian Nepomniachtchi | RUS | 2792 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | * | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| 9 | Levon Aronian | ARM | 2781 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 1 | ½ | 0 | * | 0 | 1 | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| 10 | Shakhriyar Mamedyarov | AZE | 2770 | 1 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | 1 | * | 0 | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 7.5 |
| 11 | Alireza Firouzja | FID | 2759 | ½ | 0 | 1 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | * | ½ | ½ | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| 12 | Peter Svidler | RUS | 2714 | 0 | 1 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | ½ | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| 13 | Ding Liren | CHN | 2799 | ½ | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| 14 | Daniil Dubov | RUS | 2710 | 0 | ½ | ½ | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | ½ | 1 | 0 | ½ | ½ | * | ½ | 1 | 6 |
| 15 | Alexander Grischuk | RUS | 2776 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | ½ | 1 | 1 | 0 | ½ | * | 1 | 5 |
| 16 | Alan Pichot | ARG | 2630 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ½ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | * | 1.5 |

# Home News

**BATTLE** – The ECF Chess for All Festival was a big success over the latest school half-term (May 30 - June 4), with online group coaching for 120 players provided by Lateefah Messam-Sparks and Lorin D'Costa, while Lorin and Keith Arkell gave simuls. Nigel Towers continues to manage the ECF's online activities most ably and attention has now turned to a second season of the Online County Championships. The qualifying rounds began in June, with the games once again being played at 6.30pm over five Saturdays, with the finals scheduled for September 18th.

We suspect many readers will want to take part in one of the events which will make up the British Online Chess Championships 2021, which are due to begin on July 24th, running until August 8th on the Chess.com platform. As the world continues to open up, it will be interesting to see how popular such events still prove to be.

The ECF are also, in most welcome news, working hard on planning over-the-board events. The latest to be announced was the British Junior Rapid & Blitz Championship, which will take place in Milton Keynes over the weekend of November 13th and 14th. The ECF have also kindly supplied some junior bursaries for the Northumbria Masters, a nine-round, international Swiss, which is scheduled to take place August 26-30 at the Marriott MetroCentre. Challengers, Major and Minor events are also planned – see northumbriamasters.com for further details.

*It's been great to receive reports of chess clubs reopening up and down the land, some still meeting outdoors only, others being able to return to their normal premises. Pictured we see Downend & Fishponds CC at The Cross Hands in Bristol, with Meek vs Hosken in the foreground.*

**LEAMINGTON SPA** – Despite the UK Government's delay in moving to stage four of their roadmap, the 4NCL were planning, as we went to press, on going ahead with their 25th Congress at the Woodland Grange hotel, albeit with limited numbers. We will, of course, bring you news next month of that first weekend tournament to be staged in the UK since March 2020. Do note that the 4NCL also have another congress planned at the same Leamington Spa venue for September 10-12.

4NCL and ECF CEO Mike Truran commented: "The 4NCL team are delighted to see the return of over-the-board chess at the 4NCL congress in July. A lot of hard work (and on occasion frayed tempers!) went into preparing for the congress, and our hope is that HM Government removes or reduces Covid-related restrictions in July as planned such that organising chess events becomes a lot easier all round. But if, God forbid, restrictions do continue beyond July we hope we have established a template that can be used again both by the 4NCL and by other organisations should they wish to do so. "

The 8th 4NCL Online Congress (May 21-23) resulted in a five-way tie for first in the Open. **Open**: 1-5 Robin Kneebone (Carrick), Chris Davison (Cambridge), James Cole (Cowley),

**ILKLEY** – *Matthew Webb and Andrew Wainwright have recently set up a dedicated centre for Chess in the UK. Here they provide a premium experience to all those who want to learn and play the game. This non-profit venture is a bid to transform the way chess is organised and importantly modernised to provide a blueprint for how chess can thrive in the UK and beyond. The Chess Centre is based in Ilkley and plans to offer regular coaching and tournaments, as well as host social chess and local league matches. It can be found online at www.chesscentre.online.*

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Lara Putar (Dublin), Mark Lim (Norwich) 4/5.
**Under-2000**: 1-4 Tim Jones (New Milton), Pete Leonard (Hebden Bridge), Andrew Boughen (Surbiton), Aniruddha Katkar (London) 4.
**Under-1700**: 1-2 Kieran Lappin (Hereford), Chris O'Sullivan (Ireland) 4, 3-5 George Zhao (Barnet), Ehsan Farahmandpour (Battersea), Shambavi Hariharan (Nottingham) 3½.
**Under-1400**: 1-3 Craig Reyes (Gibraltar), Bora Aydin (Maidenhead), Ngo Yu Chan (Hong Kong) 4.
**Under-1100**: 1 Adithya Ramesh (Cheshire) 4½, 2-3 Craig Robinson, Diah Dipal Patel (Coventry) 4.

There was also the small matter of the finals of the third season of the 4NCL Online League on the evening on May 18th. Celtic Tigers & Sharks pulled off their best result yet as they claimed the Division One title after a tense match with Guildford Young Guns ended 2-2, the Tigers & Sharks triumphing on board count. Once again Mark Hebden and Matthew Wadsworth impressed for Guildford, the former outplaying Mark Kvetny on board 3, while on top board the latter fought back well from a sub-optimal opening to hold fellow IM Peter Roberson. Tom Rendle and Harry Grieve drew too on bottom board, with the match ultimately decided by Ritvar Reimanis's slightly fortunate victory over Alberto Suarez Real, the Spanish IM seemingly making a mouse-slip having been pressing and when he was certainly no worse.

As well as the Tigers & Sharks, our congratulations must go too to the other divisional winners (from divisions two to seven), Hull & Beverley Romans 1, MK Phoenix 2, Barnet Knights A, Charlton Cobras A, MK Phoenix 3 and Newport A, as well as to Muswell Hill Bishops, winners of the equally successful and thriving Junior 4NCL League.

**LONDON** – We were sorry to hear of the passing of popular Pimlico Chess Club member Hamilton McMillan (xxviii.x.1946 - xx.iv.2021), who was sometime affectionately known as 'Santa Claus' and graded 163 at the time of his death from heart disease. Unlike many chess players, McMillan managed an obituary in *The Times*, having been, it transpired, a senior figure in MI6, heading its counterterrorism section until his retirement in 1997. A chemistry graduate from Balliol College, Oxford, McMillan was especially known for his ability to think outside the box, as well as for playing correspondence chess from various places around the world during his early years in the secret service.

**WALES** – The Welsh Chess Championships went online (May 28 - June 1), and saw eight players contest the first Welsh Online Championship. Jonathan Blackburn (Holmes Chapel) was defeated by fellow FM Grzegorz Toczek (Cardiff), but only dropped one other half-point, whereas Toczek was defeated by Tim Kett (Cardiff) and James Thomas (Penarth). As such, Blackburn's 5½/7 was enough for the title, finishing half a point ahead of fellow experienced chess tutor Kett. There were also Major and Minor sections, the former won by Sam Jukes (Barry) with 6/7, with Elliott MacNeil (Imperial College) half a point adrift, while in the latter Khushi Bagga's (North Cardiff) '+5' secured the title with Anshul Swamy (Merthyr Tydfil) back on 5½/7.

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# Overseas News

**HUNGARY –** Inspired by his bullet games with Magnus and determined to play some over-the-board chess, Jonathan Pein has temporarily based himself in central Europe as he attempts to progress from being an underrated 2185 to obtaining the IM title. At the 4th Vezerkepzo IM norm tournament (May 13-21), Jonathan only missed out on an IM norm by half a point, as he finished on 6½/9, just behind IM Albert Bokros. He did, however, have the consolation of absolutely butchering the Slovakian GM Milan Pacher.

**M.Pacher-J.Pein**
Budapest 2021
*Scandinavian Defence*

**1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♕xd5 3 ♘c3 ♕a5 4 d4 c6 5 ♘f3 ♗f5 6 ♘e5 ♘f6 7 g4**

7 ♗c4 e6 8 g4 remains the critical line, and if 8...♗g6 9 h4.

**7...♗e6! 8 ♗g2 ♘bd7 9 ♘xd7 ♗xd7 10 g5**

Black also seems to be OK after 10 h3 e5 followed by....0-0-0 (or even 10...h5!?).

**10...♘d5 11 0-0 ♘xc3 12 bxc3 e5!**

Trying to further fragment White's pawns and now 13 ♖e1 ♗d6 14 ♗f4 0-0-0 15 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♖xe5 ♕xc3 should offer Black enough counterplay with White a little overextended.

**13 ♗e3 ♗e6 14 dxe5 ♕xe5 15 ♖b1?**

Now Black takes over. 15 ♖e1 or 15 ♕d4 was indicated.

**15...♗d6 16 ♕h5 0-0-0 17 ♗xa7?**

Even after the superior 17 ♗d4 ♕f5 18 ♗xg7 ♖dg8!? 19 ♗f6 (19 ♗xh8? ♖xg5 is just too strong an attack, and if 20 ♕h4 ♕g6) 19...♖g6! Black has promising compensation and threatens ...♖xf6.

**17...h6!**

Pinning and effectively winning, since now the h-file is going to open. **18 f4 ♕a5 19 ♗d4 ♗c5 20 f5 ♕xc3 21 fxe6?**

21 ♗xc5 ♕xc5+ 22 ♔h1 hxg5 23 ♕xg5 ♗c4 24 ♖fe1 ♕f2 looks quite hopeless too for White with ...♖xh2+ now the threat.

**21...♕xd4+ 22 ♔h1 hxg5 23 ♕xg5**

**23...♖xh2+!**

Finishing in style.

**24 ♔xh2 ♗d6+ 0-1**

It's a rout and the finish might have been 25 ♔h1 ♖h8+ 26 ♗h3 ♖xh3+ 27 ♔g2 ♖h2+ 28 ♔f3 ♕c3+ 29 ♔e4 ♕c4+ 30 ♔e3 ♖e2+ 31 ♔f3 ♕e4#.

As we went to press, Jonathan had moved on to Prague and was taking part in a 99-player Open, which was but one component of the Prague Chess Festival (June 13-20). The Prague Masters was the headline event in which Sam Shankland had got off to a flyer. More next month.

**ROMANIA –** Shakhriyar Mamedyarov built on his semi-final result in the New in Chess Classic by storming clear at the Superbet Classic in Bucharest (June 5-14). While Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and, more surprisingly, Fabiano Caruana could only manage minus scores, Mamedyarov racked up an undefeated '+3' to claim victory in the first leg of the 2021 Grand Chess Tour. A full report next time.

As we went to press, the GCT players had moved on to Paris to contest a Rapid and Blitz event. Next up will be the Croatia Rapid and Blitz (July 5-12), featuring a certain Garry Kasparov in the blitz, then the Saint Louis Rapid and Blitz (August 9-16), before the Tour concludes with the Sinquefield Cup in the American chess Mecca (August 16-28).

**SWITZERLAND –** The second leg of the Julius Baer Challengers Chess Tour on Chess24 was the Gelfand Challenge (June 10-13). This event with its brisk 10+5 time control saw Dommaraju Gukesh finish with a wet sail, winning his last five games to catch up fellow star of the future Rameshbabu Praggnanandhaa and pip him on tie-break.

The talented Indian duo finished on 14/19, half a point ahead of Vincent Keymer, while Team Polgar again overcame Team Kramnik, this time by 101-89. Gukesh picked up $4,000 and especially a place in the Goldmoney Asian Rapid, the seventh leg of the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour and one which will be into its final stages as this magazine arrives with readers.

**USA –** We were saddened to hear of the death of Carol Jarecki (xiii.ii.1935 - xiii.vi.2021; née Fuhse), the famous American and international chess arbiter, who readers may remember officiating at the Kasparov vs *Deep Blue* match. A nurse by profession, Jarecki led quite a colourful life, both as a pilot and helping her husband Richard win over $1,000,000 in the 1960s and 1970s from a number of European casinos. Carol Jarecki was also an excellent chess administrator, running a number of important annual junior tournaments in the U.S., while serving as Tournament Director at several World Opens and as Chief Arbiter at a number of Olympiads.


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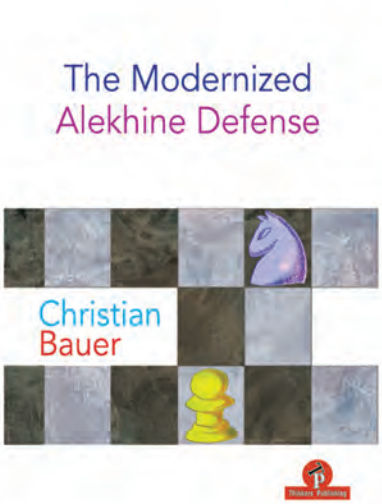


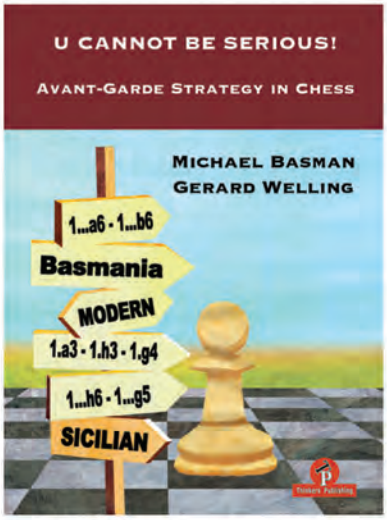

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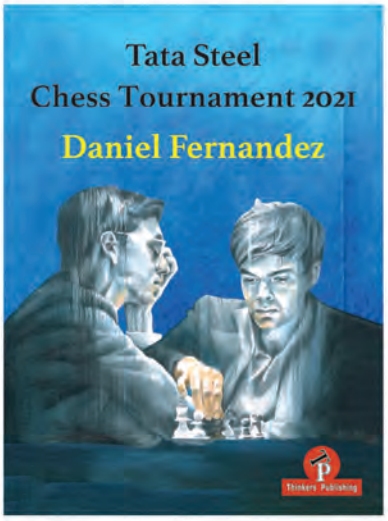
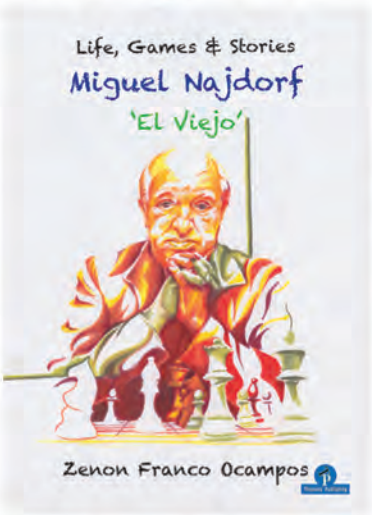
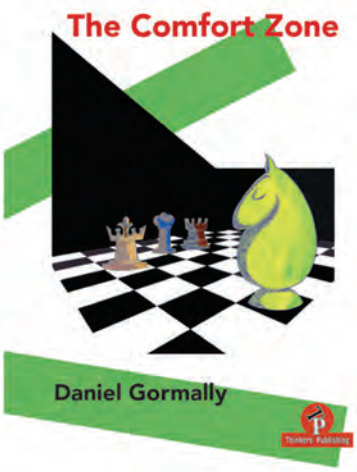
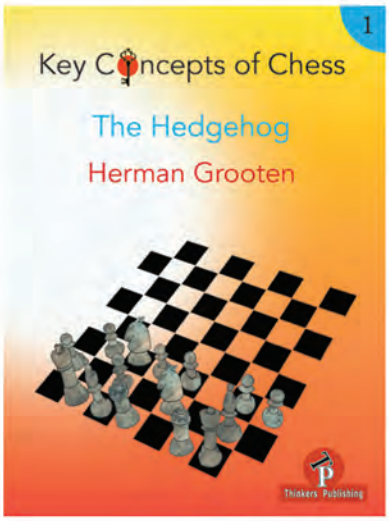
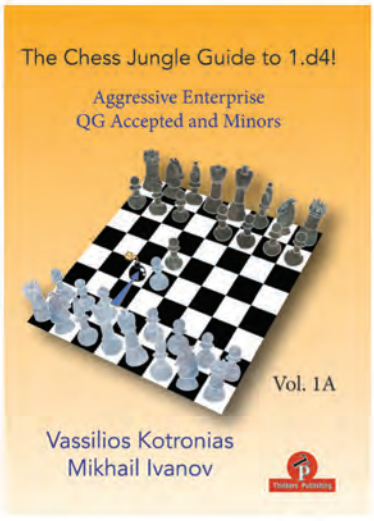


# Always One Move Ahead!



# Solutions

## to Find the Winning Moves (pages 38-40)

**1) Webb-Handley**
It's back-rank mate: **1 ♕f8+! 1-0**

**2) Mikhalevski-Bartel**
White has just blundered with the most unfortunate 1 ♖he1: **1...♘c3+! 2 ♖xc3 ♖xe1+ 3 ♔c2 ♖ce8** picked off the exchange whilst giving Black a huge attack.

**3) Zhao-Krishnan**
**1 ♗xc5! ♕xc5?** (even 1...♕d7 2 ♗xe7 ♕xe7 3 ♘h5 should be winning with the threats of f4 and ♘xf6+) **2 ♘e6 ♕d6 3 ♕xg7# 1-0**

**4) Saric-Sebenik**
White has just blundered with 1 ♔f6-f5 (1 ♘c3 would have won): **1...♘e7+! 2 ♘xe7 c3 3 ♘g6+ fxg6+ 0-1**

**5) Cole-Deary**
**1...♗xf2+! 2 ♔f1** (2 ♔xf2? ♘g4+ is a royal fork) **2...♖ce8** left Black with an overwhelming initiative, with one threat simply ...♘g4 followed by ...d4.

**6) Suarez Real-Sielecki**
**1 b3! ♕a5** (or 1...♕a3 2 ♘c4) **2 ♘c4 ♕c5 3 ♘xe5 ♕xe5 4 ♖d6! a5 5 ♕d4 1-0**

**7) Fedoseev-Duda**
**1...♗c5+ 2 ♔h2 ♗g1+! 3 ♔xg1 ♕b6+ 4 ♔h2 ♗xe4 5 ♖ae1 ♕d4! 6 d6+ ♔h8 7 d7** left Black queen for rook ahead and now the simplest way to win was **7...♖d8**, but remarkably Duda even went on to lose after many adventures.

**8) Vachier-Lagrave-Wang Hao**
**1 ♘xb5! 1-0** 1...♖xd2 (1...♘xb5 2 ♖xd8 and 1...♘d5 2 ♘c7+! are quite hopeless) 2 ♘xc7+ ♔d7 3 ♖xd2+ ♔xc7 4 c3 followed by ♔e4 and f5 is an easy win.

**9) Krishna Teja-Savic**
**1 ♖xf7+! ♖xf7** (1...♔h6!? 2 ♖h7+! ♔xh7 3 ♕h5+ is similar) **2 ♕h5+!** (it's going to be stalemate) **2...♔g8 3 ♕h8+ ♔xh8 ½-½**

**10) Karumazondo-Adair**
**1 ♗b6! fxe5** (a bolt from the blue, but if 1...♕xb6 2 ♕xd7#) **2 ♗xd8 ♖xd8 3 ♕d2 ♘ac6 4 f4** left White significant material ahead and still with the initiative.

**11) Aronian-Duda**
**1 ♖xc7+!** (the more complex 1 ♘c5!? ♗a5+ 2 ♖c3 also seems to do the trick) **1...♘xc7 2 ♕c5** (threatening ♕f8+; Black is simply too weak on the dark squares) **2...♕c4** (2...♖h8 3 ♕e7 ♘e8 4 ♘c5 ♕a5+ 5 ♔f1 ♕b5+ 6 ♔g2 will shortly force mate) **3 ♕f8+ ♔b7 4 ♘c5+ ♔b6 5 ♗xc7+ ♔b5** (or 5...♔xc7 6 ♕e7+ ♔b6 7 ♕b7+ ♔a5 8 ♖a3+) **6 ♕xa8 1-0** White will be able to evade the checks: 6...♕c1+ 7 ♔e2 ♕c2+ 8 ♔f1 ♕d1+ 9 ♔g2 ♕g4+ 10 ♖g3.

**12) Vachier-Lagrave-Alekseenko**
**1 e5! ♗c7** (or 1...♗f8 2 ♔e4 ♗h6 3 ♗d8 ♗f8 4 ♗c7 ♗e7 when one way to win is to calculate 5 ♗d6 – or 5 ♔f3 ♔f5 6 ♔g3 and only then ♗d6 – 5...♗xd6 6 exd6 ♔xd6 7 h3! followed by f5 or 7...♔e6 8 h4! ♔f6 9 ♔d5 ♔f5 10 ♔xc5 when the best that Black can achieve is a lost queen endgame, two pawns down) **2 ♔e4 ♗a5 3 ♗g5 ♗b6 4 ♗h6! 1-0** If Black isn't already in zugzwang, he soon will be in a fatal one following 4...♗c7 5 ♗f8 ♗b6 6 ♗d6 ♗a7 7 ♗c7 ♔d7 8 ♗a5 ♔e6 9 h3.

**13) Wojtaszek-Gajewski**
**1 ♗xh6! ♗g4** (1...gxh6 2 ♕xh6 is devastating, with ♘g5 one threat, ♖c4 and ♖c5 two others) **2 ♗xg7! ♔xg7 3 ♕g5+ ♔h8 4 ♕h6+ ♔g8 5 ♖e3!** (there's simply no defence) **5...♖e8 6 ♘g5 ♕d5 7 ♗h7+ 1-0**

**14) Praggnanandhaa-Tristan**
**1 ♘e4! ♖xc4?** (1...♖5c6 had to be tried when 2 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 3 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 isn't totally clear, but 2 a3! ♘bd5 3 ♗xd5 exd5 4 ♘xf6+ ♕xf6 5 ♕xf6! gxf6 6 ♖xc6 ♖xc6 7 ♔d2 should be a winning rook ending) **2 ♖xc4 ♘d3+ 3 ♔e2 ♖xc4 4 ♘xf6+ gxf6?** (4...♕xf6 5 ♕xc4 is also trivial) **5 ♕xh7+ ♔f8 6 ♕h8# 1-0**

**15) Lysyj-Tekeyev**
**1 ♗g5+!** (1 ♕c7+ ♔e6 2 ♕c8+ ♔e7 3 ♕b7+? followed by further checks let Black off the hook in the game) **1...♕xg5 2 ♕c7+ ♔e8 3 ♕xf7+ ♔d8 4 ♕g8+! ♔c7 5 ♖f7+** forces mate, as with **5...♔c6 6 ♕c8+ ♔b6 7 ♖b7+ ♔a6 8 ♕a8#**.

**16) Sanal-Nikac**
**1 ♗xh5! ♖h8** (1...gxh5 2 ♖xh5 b4 3 ♕c4 followed by ♕d4+ is crushing) **2 ♕c3+ ♔g8 3 ♖hd1! ♖xh5 4 ♖d8+ ♔f7 5 ♖xc8! ♖xc8 6 ♖d7 1-0**

**17) Abasov-Iskandarov**
**1...♖xg3+!** (1...♖xf4! 2 gxf4 ♖e2+! also does the trick) **2 ♔xg3 ♖e3+ 3 ♔g2 ♖e2+! 4 ♗xe2 ♕xe2+ 5 ♔h3 ♕g4+ 6 ♔h2 ♕xf4+ 0-1** The finish would be 7 ♔g2 ♕g4+ 8 ♔f1 (or 8 ♔h2 ♗e5#) 8...♕f3+ 9 ♔e1 ♕f2#.

**18) Mosadeghpour-Daghli**
**1...♘c2!** (Black's king is exposed and Harry powerful, and in the game the knight dropped off after 1...♘e2? 2 ♕g5+ f6 3 ♕e3 ♕c7+ 4 g3 f5 5 ♗f3 1-0) **2 ♗xc2** (2 ♕g5+ f6 3 ♕c1 ♖c8 is fine for Black, since he will immediately regain a pawn if White takes twice on c2) **2...♕xh4+! 3 ♔g1 ♖h8 4 ♔f1 ♕c4+! 5 ♔g1** (and not 5 ♖e2?? ♖h1#) **5...♕h4** would have forced a repetition, as pointed out by Sam Collins in his ChessPublishing column.

**19) Talsma-Adair**
**1 ♗xh7+! ♔xh7 2 ♘g5+ ♔g6** (2...♔g8? 3 ♕h5 ♗e4 4 f5! is crushing) **3 ♕d3+! f5 4 exf6+ ♔xf6 5 ♘h7+ ♔f7 6 ♘g5+** (6 ♘xf8? ♔xf8 7 f5 ♔g8 would be pretty much winning, but for Black, not White) **6...♔f6** and now White settled for a repetition, but **7 f5!** would have left him with a decisive attack: **7...♘d6** (not, of course, 7...♔xg5? 8 ♕g3+, heading for g6, or 7...exf5?? 8 ♕xf5# and 7...e5 8 ♕g3 is also a killer, followed by ♕h4 or 8...♖h8 9 ♖ce1 d6 10 ♖e3! and simply ♖fe1; Black is simply far too tied up and playing without two of his pieces) **8 ♖ce1! g6** (again, not 8...♔xg5? 9 ♕g3+ and 8...♖ae8? 9 fxe6+! ♔xg5 10 ♖e5+ now forces mate too, while 8...♘xf5 9 ♖xf5+! exf5 10 ♘h7+ ♔f7 11 ♖xe7+ ♔xe7 12 ♘xf8 ♖xf8 13 ♕g3 should be a fairly easy win with such a rampant queen) **9 ♘h7+ ♔g7** (9...♔f7 10 fxe6+ ♔g7 11 ♘xf8 ♖xf8 12 ♖xf8 ♔xf8 13 ♕xg6 is no real improvement, White's initiative just being too strong) **10 f6+ ♖xf6 11 ♘xf6** would have won the exchange, while maintaining strong pressure and definite attacking chances.

**20) Aronian-So**
**1 e8♘+!** (and not 1 e8♕?? ♕g5#) **1...♔h6 2 ♕xf6 ♖xe8 3 ♘d6** left White with a winning attack: **3...♕c7 4 ♗b6!** (4 ♔h4! also works) **4...♕b8** (or 4...♕xb6 5 ♘xf5+ ♔h5 6 ♕h4#) **5 ♗d4 1-0**

**21) Aronian-So**
**1...♗b7!** (1...♖ff2? 2 ♖xa6 ♖g2+ 3 ♔f1 was winning for White in the game: 3...♖xh2 4 ♖xa7+ ♔e8 5 ♘c6+ ♔f8 6 ♖f3+ ♔g8 7 ♘e7+ ♔g7 – or 7...♔h8 8 ♘g6+! hxg6 9 ♖f8# – 8 ♘d5+ ♔g8 9 ♘f6+ ♔h8 10 ♖xh7+! ♖xh7 11 ♘xh7 ♔xh7 12 ♖g3 1-0) **2 c6+!** (of course, not 2 ♖xa7?? ♖g2+ 3 ♔h1 ♖f1# and 2 ♖ae1 ♖g2+ 3 ♔h1 ♖ff2 would unsurprisingly only force White to be careful to draw) **2...♗xc6 3 ♖xa7+ ♔d6 4 ♘xc6 ♔xc6 5 ♖xh7** leaves White two pawns to the good, but with a most sub-optimal king position. Indeed, it's no surprise that Black has sufficient counterplay, as shown by **5...♖d1+ 6 ♔g2 ♖d2+ 7 ♔g3 ♖g8+ 8 ♔h3 ♖gg2**.

**22) Alekseenko-Ding Liren**
Poor Alekseenko found himself totally lost after 1 ♗c5? ♖b8 2 ♗b4 (or 2 ♖d1 ♖b1 3 ♕d2 ♗f4) 2...♖xb4! 3 ♕xb4 ♕xd3 4 ♘f3 ♕f1+ 5 ♘g1 ♗d4, but the calm (and tricky) **1 ♗b2!** would have avoided such back-rank issues: **1...c5 2 ♘f3! ♖xd3** (and not 2...♗xc3? 3 ♖xd8+ ♔h7 4 ♘g5+) **3 ♕xe5 ♖d1+ 4 ♔h2 ♕xe5+ 5 ♗xe5** when White's material advantage should really be a decisive one.

**23) Grischuk-Vachier-Lagrave**
**1 ♖xh5! gxh5** and now the ultra-calm **2 ♖h3!** (2 ♖xh5? was preferred in the game where 2...♖d4! 3 ♖h1 ♖xa4+ 4 ♔b1 ♕d5 – 4...♖h4! was even simpler – 5 ♕h5 ♕xh1+ 6 ♕xh1 ♖g4 saw Black staying on the board, although the defensive task would prove too much for Vachier-Lagrave in the run-up to the time control) **2...♖d4?** (2...♕e6 3 ♖xh5 ♗g7 4 ♕e4 is also devastating and even 2...♖a1+!? 3 ♗xa1 ♕d1 4 ♕xd1 ♖xd1 5 ♗xe5 should be winning with h5 set to fall) **3 ♗xd4 ♕xd4 4 ♕xh5** would have won.

**24) Nepomniachtchi-Carlsen**
**1...d3!!** (1...♔f7 2 ♖f4+ is not progress, with ♖e4 or ♕e4 to follow) **2 ♕xe6+ ♕xe6 3 ♖xe6 d2 4 ♖d6 c5?** (allowing White a study-like chance to save himself; the pawns would simply have proved too strong after 4...♔f7 5 g4 ♔e7 6 ♖d3 c5 when there's no ♗d5+ and if 7 ♔g3 ♖c3!) **5 g4 c4 6 ♔g3 c3 7 ♔h4?** (7 ♗d5+! ♔f8 8 ♗b3! would have saved the day after 8...♖c1 9 ♔f2 or 8...♖b2 9 ♗d1 c2 10 ♗xc2 ♖xc2 11 ♔f3) **7...♔f8 8 ♗f3 ♖c1 9 ♖d3 ♔e7! 10 ♔g5 ♖f1 11 ♖e3+ ♔d6 12 ♖d3+ ♔e5 13 ♖xc3 ♖xf3 14 ♖xf3 d1♕ 15 ♖f5+ ♔e4 16 a5 ♕d6 17 ♔h4 g6 0-1**

# This Month's New Releases

**The Fully-Fledged French**
Viktor Moskalenko, 368 pages
New In Chess
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

Viktor Moskalenko is back, with another book on his favourite subject, the French Defence, which is subtitled 'Fresh Strategies and Resources for Dynamic Chess Players'. It shows how quickly time is passing when we consider the age of his three previous books for New in Chess on the same subject, namely: *The Flexible French* (2008), *The Wonderful Winawer* (2010), and *The Even More Flexible French* (2015). As the back-cover blurb puts it, "Time has not stood still, and the popular French Defence has seen a lot of new developments, not in the last place thanks to Moskalenko's books."

Essentially, this book is a thoroughly revised version of *The Even More Flexible French.* The original version's coverage of virtually all French Defence lines – enabling readers to pick and choose their favourites in order to construct a full repertoire against 1 e4 – remains intact. There has been a restructuring of material, the addition of 56 new games, "updates and expansions in every chapter" and "hundreds of improvements, alternatives and new ideas."

The book will look familiar to readers of the previous books, but as Moskalenko says "We can speak of new wine in old bottles!". It is good to see photographs in the book as they help to bring the chess personalities off the pages. However, the reproduction of the photographs is poor in some cases and those of lesser quality should have been omitted altogether.

It is not such an easy task to pick out the new material and some of the changes are more substantial than others. I would have preferred a new volume to bring the story up to date, which would have solved the problem of trying to see the wood for the trees.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see which lines have been amended by Moskalenko. One example sees new coverage of a rare move in the Tarrasch variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘d2 c5 4 exd5 ♕xd5 5 ♘gf3 cxd4 6 ♗c4 and now, instead of the well-worn 6...♕d6, there has been recent interest in 6...♕d7.

This has been seen before, of course, but there are some extra twists both players need to know. One idea is to play an early ...♗d6 and ...♘e7. This gives Black the extra idea of playing the knight to g6, offering a slightly different way of protecting the kingside than the standard placement of ...♘f6.

It's the little quirks such as these which can be especially potent at club level, as they disarm copious amounts of preparation and throw opponents back on their own resources. Speaking of which, fans of the French need to keep an eye the expanding developments in the variation 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗d3 which is suddenly becoming popular and receives good coverage here.

I admire Moskalenko's dedication and commitment to the French Defence. Fellow fans of 1 e4 e6 will no doubt buy this new book on trust – although they will be acquiring a significant amount of duplicate material. French Defence novices will find this book inspiring and accessible, as is the case with all of Moskalenko's works.

*Sean Marsh*

**The Livonian Knight:**
**Selected Games of Alvis Vitolins**
Zigurds Lanka, Edvins Kengis, Janis Klovans and Janis Vitomskis, 132 pages, Elk and Ruby
RRP £14.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £13.49**

Who was Alvis Vitolins and why do we need a book about him?

According to the authors, in their foreword: "This book is dedicated to one of Latvia's greatest players; his name is well-known in Latvia and the former Soviet Union, but has remained relatively obscure in the West – except maybe to Cochrane Gambit fans."

The mention of that gambit (1 e4 e5 2 ♘f3 ♘f6 3 ♘xe5 d6 4 ♘xf7) already gives an indication as the style of Vitolins. His creativity is highlighted by this second quote from the authors: "The goal of this book is to remind those who started to forget about the existence of this outstanding master and show Vitolins's achievements to those who'd never heard about one of Latvia's most original players. His ingenious opening ideas and creative, uncompromising play must be preserved for future generations of chess fans."

The book was first published in Latvia in 2008 and we should be thankful that Elk and Ruby have once again brought an interesting volume to a whole new audience. Genna Sosonko has added a new foreword for this English edition and he stresses the influence of Vitolins on other Latvian players, including the most famous of them all.

"As I watched the games, I saw exactly what Tal meant when, during analysis, he would sacrifice material for an initiative and, rubbing his hands together, said, 'And now, let's play like Vitolins...'"

There are 10 chapters, featuring 25 illustrative games. These span from 1960 to

1989 and the last game in the book is, rather fittingly, against the rising Latvian star of the time – Alexei Shirov. The chapters are arranged thematically, according to the new opening ideas played by Vitolins. Categories include Labyrinths of the Najdorf Sicilian, The Nimzowitsch-Vitolins Gambit and, intriguingly, Vitolins Versus Fischer. The last-named of the three shows Vitolins in action against the Poisoned Pawn Variation – a Fischer favourite – rather than games against the 11th world champion himself.

The annotations are a balanced mixture of prose and variations, with plenty of eye-catching diagrams. Incidentally, anyone looking to spice up the Nimzo-Indian may want to investigate 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 ♕c2 0-0 5 ♘f3 b5!? and 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 4 e3 0-0 5 ♘e2 b5!?, which are both perfect examples of the Vitolins style.

Why isn't Vitolins more famous? Partly because he fell some way short of reaching his potential. He was obsessed with chess and would analyse new variations for many, many hours. Yet somehow he never became a grandmaster. Sosonko cites a lack of tournament opportunities, which is certainly a valid point. There is also a case to be made for various elements of impracticality in Vitolins' play, the onset of boredom in dull positions and a certain amount of nerves.

The elephant in the room is the mental illness suffered by Vitolins, which led to his death by suicide in 1997 at the young age of 50. This book skirts around the issue and keeps the spotlight on his games. This is a fault, as it leaves the story of his life unfinished. Sosonko notes that Vitolins "didn't have any other biography, any other life besides that involving games, tournaments and endless analytical work." This is clearly untrue and it is a shame that more detail wasn't added for the English edition of the book. How many more books will we see on Vitolins? Probably none, so the opportunity of telling the full story has more than likely been missed completely.

Nevertheless, given the stance of the authors, the book will either stand or fall by the quality of the games – and here, the reader will find copious amounts of entertainment. A small sample:

This game shows what happens when fire meets fire; the board is ablaze. Vitolins has several ways to draw, but only one path to victory.

**42...♖d8!**, protecting the d-pawn with tactics (43 ♘xd8 ♗d4+ is clearly unacceptable for White). Shirov did not manage to last much longer (0-1, 50).

There are plenty more similarly startling moments in this book, which can be recommended to seekers of chess tactics and entertainment, although further reading will certainly be required to learn more about the life of Vitolins.

*Sean Marsh*

**Bishop Versus Knight: The Eternal Battle Volume 1**
Boroljub Zlatanovic, 232 pages, paperback
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

The first volume in the latest series from Thinkers Publishing aims to help the reader appreciate better how to handle the bishop and knight, as well as the relationship between the two. Serbian IM Zlatanovic examines mistakes by even the world's best, as he looks at both those endgame positions in which the bishop is dominant and more closed ones which favour the knight. The examples are clear and well-explained, so if you'd like to improve your endgame technique or handling of the minor pieces, this new work could well come in handy.

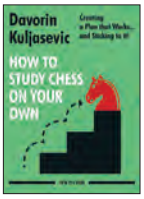
**Genna Remembers**
Genna Sosonko, 260 pages, paperback
RRP £28.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £26.05**

We suspect that this release from Thinkers will prove very popular. Genna Sosonko is, of course, well known not only as a former world-class player, but especially these days for the window his writings have opened for a western audience into life in the USSR and especially the Soviet chess world. Ben Graff chatted with Genna in our February pages and here Sosonko looks back on his rich life. He recounts some of his favourite anecdotes, while reflecting on what it was like to emigrate to the west and reminds the reader all about the chess world of the twentieth century. As he puts things so well, "It was an intriguing and colorful world, and I saw it as my duty not to let it disappear into that empty abyss."

**Grandmaster Repertoire: Leningrad Dutch**
Mihail Marin, 344 pages, paperback
RRP £22.50 **SUBSCRIBERS £20.25**

It's great to see post-Brexit quality works once again flying off the Quality Chess presses. They include this repertoire by a world-class author and theoretician on one of his favourite and most uncompromising defences, the Leningrad Dutch, 1 d4 f5 2 g3 ♘f6 3 ♗g2 g6 4 ♗g2 ♗g7 5 0-0 0-0 6 c4 d6 7 ♘c3 ♕e8. Marin's coverage is unsurprisingly comprehensive, while featuring not just a number of new ideas for Black, but a wealth of strategic explanation.

Do note that it's possible to prefer a hardback version of *Grandmaster Repertoire: Leningrad Dutch,* available for £26.99 from Chess & Bridge, with the same being true for Marin's companion volume, *Grandmaster Repertoire: Dutch Sidelines* (paperback: £22.50; hardback: £26.99). There he completes his repertoire with 1 d4 f5, aiming to defang those dangerous sidelines, 2 ♘c3, 2 ♗g5 and 2 e4, while also taking a good look at 1 ♘f3 f5 and 1 c4 f5 move orders.




**How to Study Chess on Your Own**
Davorin Kuljasevic, 368 pages, paperback
RRP £22.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £20.65**

This topic must be of interest to virtually every reader, so we will have a full review in our August pages. For now we note that the Croatian GM and experienced coach – a product of Texas Tech University – explains how to optimise your studying and learning, while looking at what types of material are suitable for different levels. Kuljasevic has clearly thought deeply about the subject and presents many original thoughts, which should at least serve to make readers consider certain topics. Notably he is happy to help with studying "your openings deeply", while the work contains a number of exercises to help drive home the more important points.

**How to Study the Classics**
Adrian Mikhalchishin; PC-DVD,
running time: 5 hours
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

This is also an important topic for the aspiring player and one which the highly-experienced Slovenian Grandmaster knows all about, having made good use of the classics in his teaching for many decades. Mikhalchishin demonstrates how viewers should study the classics, while presenting a run-down of which world champions were especially good at what. He takes a look at a number of important topics, with the aim of, for instance, helping the viewer to better understand Maroczy Bind positions or appreciate more how to know when to change the central pawn structure.

**Komodo Dragon 2**
Larry Kaufman and Mark Lefler, PC-DVD
RRP £89.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £80.99**

*Komodo Dragon 2* is based solely on Neural Network Chess Evaluation, programmers Larry Kaufman and Mark Lefler having completely switched approach since *Komodo 14* to move to a deep-learning approach. That older program was, however, used for a great many training games, with the result that *Komodo Dragon* 2 excels at positional play and also boasts ginormous tactical power. Interestingly, it's now possible to ask *Komodo* what the best move is in a position from a practical point of view, while the whole package comes with the *Fritz 17* interface.

Also recently released by ChessBase is *ChessBase Magazine 201*, which is also a PC-DVD and retails at £17.99, or £16.19 for Subscribers. Inside there's a special tribute to Vasyl Ivanchuk, as well as contributions from the likes of Anish Giri, Mihail Marin and Peter Heine Nielsen.

**New in Chess Yearbook 138**
Peter Boel, René Olthof & Jan Timman (eds.), 256 pages, paperback
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

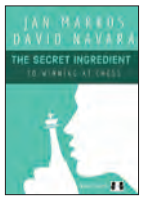
The forum section of the *Yearbook* continues to grow and is, perhaps unsurprisingly, dominated by opening developments from this year's Wijk aan Zee, while also featuring an intriguing sideline against the Najdorf. Elsewhere Erwin L'Ami looks at some very important opening trends from the correspondence world – ones which should be of help to the theoretically keen OTB player. There are also all the usual opening surveys, including four on the Caro-Kann and Gawain Jones examining a recent trend in the Advance French. Incidentally, Gawain recommends that opening in his, as we went to press, soon-to-be-published *Coffeehouse Repertoire* for Quality Chess – see the inside back cover.

**Puzzle Quest 2020**
Ivan Ivanisevic, 304 pages, hardback
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

In this latest Chess Informant hardback work, the Serbian Grandmaster aims to show readers not so much how to solve tactical positions, but rather how to evaluate all types of position, ahead of deciding what needs doing. As such, while some of the 500 positions feature a sacrificial finish, others require the reader to come up with the right plan. All the games come from 2020, with the positions arranged from one star to five star difficulty categories.

**The Saemisch Variation against the King's Indian and Benoni**
Jan Werle; PC-DVD, running time: 7 hours
RRP £26.95 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.25**

Dutch GM Jan Werle is quietly developing a reputation for his clear but detailed presentations in the ChessBase studio. Here he takes a good look at one of his favourite lines, 1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 g6 3 ♘c3 ♗g7 4 e4 d6 5 f3. Werle maps out a repertoire for White, one which he is keen for the viewer to remember, since each section ends with a number of helpful memory markers, exercises and even a drill, where the viewer has to make use of the interactive feature of these DVDs to play out the opening moves against the program. Notable too is the recommendation of the modern 5...0-0 6 ♘ge2 move order, and if 6...c5 7 d5 e6 8 ♗g5.




**The Secret Ingredient to Winning at Chess**
Jan Markos & David Navara, 224 pages, hardback
RRP £26.99 **SUBSCRIBERS £24.29**

The identity of the authors certainly make one sit up and take note with this new release from Quality Chess. Slovakian GM Jan Markos has already made quite a name for himself and here teams up with world-class Czech Grandmaster David Navara. They explore a number of little discussed but very important topics, not least how to prepare, how best to work with the computer, how to allocate your time at the board and, especially, what magical ingredient sets the very best in the world apart from the average grandmaster. The material is fresh, well written and most certainly thought-provoking.

Also recently arrived at Chess & Bridge is *I was a Victim of Bobby Fischer* by Mark Taimanov (248 pages, hardback, RRP £26.99, Subscribers – £24.29), a timely Quality Chess translation of the legendary Russian Grandmaster's work from the early 1990s. Inside Taimanov not only analyses Fischer's chess in some detail, but takes a good look at all six games from their infamous 1971 match in Vancouver, one which was initially anything but one-sided.

Finally, last month we listed an exciting new work, *The Queen's Gambit – Accepted!* by Jonathan Arnott and Rosie Irwin. If you were thinking of buying this as a gift for someone new to the game, do note that Chess & Bridge now have a few hardback and signed copies in stock, retailing at £19.99 or £17.99 for Subscribers.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# Saunders on Chess

**Follow me on Twitter: @johnchess or email: johns@chess.co.uk**

The last year and a half have been replete with new experiences for us all. Some of them have been surreal: nothing to do with chess, but the strangest one for me was about a year ago during the first lockdown when, after much pleading, I was allowed an hour's visit to an elderly relative at a major provincial hospital by a generous hospital doctor (who may have been breaking various regulations in the process). I arrived at the main entrance to this huge hospital to find... not a living soul. No staff, no visitors (of course)... nobody. I had to ring through to the ward to get someone to collect me and walk me through (mostly) empty corridors. It was like a sci-fi film depicting a world bereft of people, at least until I arrived at the ward to witness the full panoply of PPE-clad humans.

In the past month I have had an experience which in some ways was as strange. A trip to Gibraltar to act as press officer for the last leg of the FIDE Women's Grand Prix series, where the strangeness consisted mainly of a reversion to the world as it was before the pandemic. No sooner had I passed through the airport than I was greeted by the sight of people going about their business minus masks.

Gibraltar, being a small and manageable place, had completed the vaccination of its consenting adult citizens. As an old timer, I had thankfully completed my own vaccination programme before travelling and didn't feel threatened by this brave new maskless world. The pandemic still intruded to a certain extent, with tests to be undergone and forms to be completed in preparation for the eventual flight back to Blighty, but for the most part the pandemic and its consequence could be safely put out of mind, even in the playing hall, where the players were able to play without masks.

New experiences didn't end there for me. I had rather expected to be carrying out my usual press duties as per the Gibraltar Festival, namely writing reports, handling social media and taking photos. Much to my surprise, the FIDE organisers presented me with an additional task – interviewing the players immediately after games on camera. As someone with a great face for radio I had rather assumed that role would be taken by someone considerably younger than me, perhaps female (since this was a women's tournament), and perhaps with more experience than mine (which was zero). Indeed, that had been the plan, but the person invited to do it had not been able to make the trip.

Was I daunted? Well, to be honest, I was at first, as I contemplated the prospect of conducting five or six such interviews a day for eleven days. However, I soon got used to doing it and joked with organiser Stuart Conquest, "You'll have to wrest this microphone out of my cold, dead hands." It's a lot of fun, but also exhausting and intensive. I was lucky in that I had previously had the privilege of watching it done at close quarters by polished professional performers such as Tania Sachdev and Fiona Steil-Antoni, and my already high regard for their work has now taken on stratospheric proportions. They make it look easy and natural, but the secret lies in their thorough preparation. (My first ever such interview, with the Muzychuk sisters, has an amusing moment in which I reveal my own lack of preparedness.)

I must also pay tribute to the players, who are also hard-working professionals, and who are contractually obliged to accede to interviews at the very moment their games finish. Just think about that: all amateur players know how much a tough game of classical chess can take out of us, but then imagine that ratcheted up a couple of notches – professional chess is usually played at a higher level of intensity than the amateur game – and then you are expected to endure an old guy with a microphone firing questions at you for 10 or 15 minutes before you can relax. That didn't always make mine the most popular face to see as players left the playing hall, but once I had gently cajoled them in the direction of the studio and the camera started rolling, they were all highly cooperative and forthcoming.

This series of close post-game encounters with top-level players gave me fresh insights into their behaviour and demeanour. Some players seem to have a sort of switch in their head which they throw as they revert to regular human form after several hours as chess calculating machines. One notable example is Russian GM Valentina Gunina who played a series of colossally long, complicated games in Gibraltar.

After one such mind-bendingly complex game, which she won, Valentina saw me as she left the studio and silently accompanied me to the studio to take up her place at the microphone. She waited, still in silence and uncharacteristically impassive, as the director/cameraman readied himself to start shooting and gave me the nod to begin. It was obvious to me that she was still lost in the game and that this time I would need to throw the switch for her. Instead of starting with a question as usual, I began: "Valentina – you haven't said a word since you left the playing hall!" Her face wreathed in her customary smiles. Valentina had rejoined the human race.

Some of the younger participants in the tournament were particularly good fun and were not above a bit of teasing. One of them mentioned something about me being a "psychologist" and tittered as her colleague said "Sigmund Freud". I later learnt that they had seen a comment made by someone on YouTube comparing my ancient, grizzled countenance with that of the founder of psychoanalysis. Well, there are worse people to be compared to. And it was all the funnier because the roles were reversed, with the players being the learned professors and me the student seeking enlightenment. The whole tournament was a truly wonderful experience which I shall treasure.

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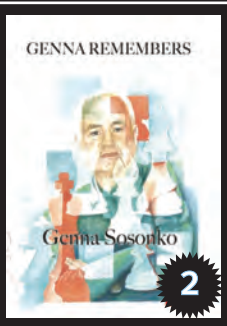

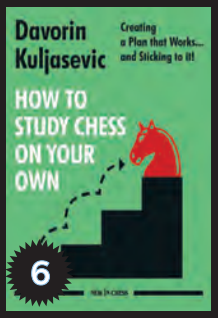


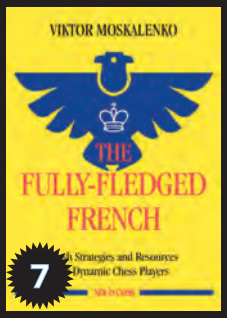

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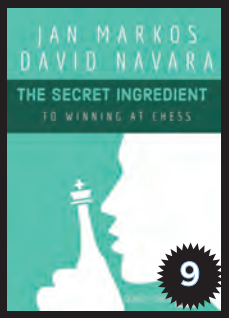


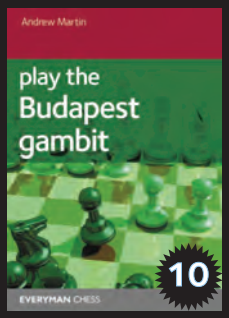

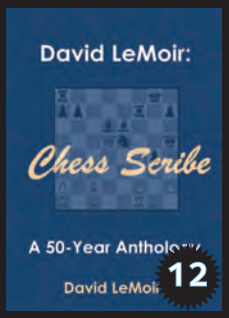

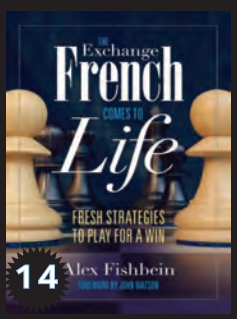

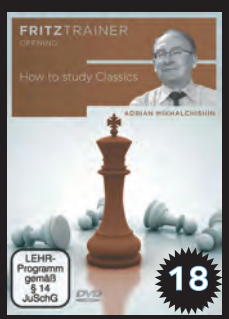


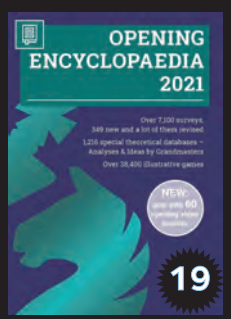

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